Illuminating the Spiritual:
The Symbolic Art of Christian Waller

by

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May 2017

Volume I–Text

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University

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Declaration

This is to certify that:

a. The thesis comprises only my original work;

b. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;

and

c. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length exclusive of footnotes, tables, bibliographies, and appendices.

Grace Blakeley-Carroll
This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my great-aunt,
Gwenneth Marian Carroll (1922–2009),
an inspirational research librarian and lover of the arts.
Acknowledgments

I could not have completed this thesis without the generous support and assistance of a number of individuals and organisations. I wish to particularly thank Dr Andrew Montana, my Primary Supervisor and Chair of my Supervisory Panel. Dr Montana has provided constant support, mentorship and guidance throughout the research and writing of this thesis. I am grateful for the reliability and rigour of his feedback, for our many stimulating discussions about art and design, and for his belief in the value of my research. I also thank Professor Helen Ennis, my Associate Supervisor. Professor Ennis joined my panel in the latter stages of this project and introduced new perspectives to my writing that were instrumental in facilitating the development of my academic voice. My second Associate Supervisor, Dr Bronwyn Hughes, has consistently gone above and beyond her role. She has generously shared her unrivalled knowledge of Australian stained glass with me. I am grateful for the friendship she has shown me and for her efforts in helping me access archives, churches and scholars in her home state of Victoria. In the earlier stages of this research Emeritus Professor Sasha Grishin AM, as an Associate Supervisor, provided important guidance and mentorship for which I am grateful.

I am indebted to individuals who generously shared their knowledge with me and also the custodians of the archives, galleries, libraries, museums and private collections who gave me access to their collections. They include: Associate Professor Alison Inglis, Art History Department, University of Melbourne; Cindy Seeberger and the staff of Beleura House and Garden; Anne Rowland and the Ballarat Art Gallery; Peter Perry, Emma Busowsky Cox and the Castlemaine Art Museum; David Thomas; Professor Catherine Speck, Art History Department, University of Adelaide; Fiona Moore; William Twycross; Gene and Anne Willsford; Dr Susan Kellett; Geoffrey Edwards and the Geelong Gallery; Terence Lane and the Trustees of the Waller Estate; Chris Deutscher; Ken Bethell; Dr Jenny McFarlane; Geoffrey Wallace; Professor Harriet Edquist, RMIT University; Rebecca Edwards, the Department of Australian Art, and the Shaw Research Library, National Gallery of Victoria; Art Gallery of South Australia; University of Western Australia Archives; Australian War Memorial; Warrnambool Art Gallery; McClelland Art Gallery and
Sculpture Park; National Library of Australia; State Library Victoria; State Library of South Australia; Bendigo Art Gallery; Heritage Victoria; Campbell Theosophical Research Library; the Theosophical Library and Archive; State Library of Queensland; Hamilton Art Gallery; Mount Macedon Historical Society; Castlemaine Historical Society; Bendigo Historical Society; Mount Rouse and District Historical Society, Fawkner Crematorium, Yarra Ranges Regional Museum; June McAuliffe; Garry MacPherson; Carey Walden; Clare Renner; Jane Carmichael; Ian Potter Museum of Art; Michael Collins Persse and Geelong Grammar School; Scotch College, Melbourne; John Yandell; Peter Tregear; Tony Tibballs; Matthew Cox and the Art Gallery of New South Wales; Queen’s College, University of Melbourne; National Film and Sound Archive; Palace Mission Archive of Father Divine; Warrnambool Art Gallery; and, Heritage Victoria’s Conservation Centre.

Thank you also to the staff, volunteers and clergy of various churches and church archives for assisting me with my research, including: Jill Bales and St Paul’s, Canterbury; Audrey Fairley and All Saints’ Canowindra; Jonathan Harvey and Christchurch, Geelong; Kay Pentland and the Koornang Uniting Church; Jennifer Bars and the Uniting Church Archives of Victoria and Tasmania; John Nelson and All Saints’, Newton, Geelong; St Matthew’s, East Geelong; Willem and Pam Vandenberg and Presbyterian Church, Shelford; Reverend Graham McLeod and St Ambrose’s, Gilgandra; St Matthew’s, Prahran; Reverend Matthew Williams and St James’ Old Cathedral; St Mark’s, Camberwell; Reverend Noel Staniforth, St Barnabas’, West Wyalong; Graeme Kitney, St Peter’s, Brighton Beach; Tom Sullivan, Aidan Coleman and St Bart’s Church, Norwood, South Australia; Janet Simpson and St Peter’s, Glenelg, South Australia; St Paul’s, Frankston; St Paul’s, Linton; and, Louise Ryan and St James’ Ivanhoe.

I would like to especially thank Roger Butler AM and the staff of the Australian Prints, Drawings and Illustrated Books section of the Australian Art Department, National Gallery of Australia, for enabling me to re-catalogue their Christian Waller collection, which was profoundly beneficial to this study. I am particularly grateful to Butler for our many stimulating discussions about Waller’s art and for making his research files available to me. I also wish to express my gratitude to Bianca Hill for facilitating my research at the Gallery.
During overseas fieldwork I had the opportunity to meet scholars and access collections that advanced my research. I thank: Dr Nicola Gordon Bowe and the University College, Dublin; Peter Cormack and the Victoria and Albert Museum; the National Gallery of Ireland; Dr Jasmine Allen and the Art History Department of the University of York; the Stained Glass Museum at Ely Cathedral; the British Library; the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum; Tate Britain; King Arthur’s Great Halls, Tintagel; Hunterian Art Museum; Father Divine Archive; Dr Joseph McBrinn and the School of Art and Design, University of Ulster; Professor Clare Willsdon, Art History Department, University of Glasgow; and, Dublin City Gallery the Hugh Lane.

While completing this thesis I received study assistance and access to flexible working arrangements from my former employer—the National Portrait Gallery of Australia—and my current workplace—the National Library of Australia. I acknowledge and thank my former and current colleagues for their support, in particular: Angus Trumble, Karen Vickery, Krysia Kitch, Cathy Pilgrim, Dr Guy Hansen and Dr Susannah Helman. Other professional affiliations have provided me with invaluable opportunities to deliver conference papers and seminars based on my research, and I thank: The Art Association of Australia and New Zealand; the Australian Historical Association; the Sacred in Literature and the Arts; Jane Cush and the Goulburn Regional Art Gallery; and, further afield, the Association of Art Historians.

I would also like to thank the staff and students of the Centre for Art History and Art Theory, Australian National University (ANU) School of Art and Design, for fostering a stimulating and supportive research environment. Thank you also to Dr Vivien Silvey and the staff at the Academic Skills and Learning Centre at the ANU for your invaluable assistance with my academic writing. I am grateful to Kon Kudo for his assistance with image editing. I thank the Australian Government and the ANU for awarding me an Australian Postgraduate Award scholarship to undertake this research.

I wholeheartedly thank my friends and family for their support and understanding over the past six years, in particular: Sanchee Barnes, David Bucholtz, Jessica Bucholtz, Roz Bucholtz, Ruth Bucholtz, David Carroll, Dorothy Carroll, Lynda Carroll, Tiffany Cole, Dr Sarah Engledow, Kathryne Ford, Cara Foster, Dr Jennifer
Gall, Claire Game, Dr David Game, Helena Game, Jeremy Game, Beata Gasanova, Jennifer Gough, Belinda Hungerford, Renée Joyce, Dr Susan Kellett, Katrina Osborne, Anna Pearce, Diana Richardson, David Rivers, Hugh Rivers, Maria Checa Rivers, Susan Rivers, Axel Simon, Elizabeth Carroll Simon, Professor Bruce Thompson and Vanessa Wright. My deepest gratitude goes to Pamela Blakeley, Peter Carroll and Isabella Edquist for proofreading this thesis and for providing a great deal of encouragement.

Above all, I wish to profoundly thank William Blakeley-Game for his invaluable support, unwavering belief in my capacity to complete this thesis and for never questioning its importance to me.
Abstract

Australian artist Christian Waller née Yandell (1894–1954) created artworks that unified her aesthetic and spiritual values. The technical and expressive brilliance of her work across a range of art media—drawing, painting, illustration, printmaking, stained glass and mosaic—makes it worthy of focused scholarly attention. Important influences on her practice included Pre-Raphaelitism, Art Deco and the Celtic Revival. Her spirituality was informed by a range of orthodox and alternative systems of belief, including: Christianity, Theosophy, the Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn and the International Peace Mission Movement. Acting as an emissary, she included personal symbols—especially the sun, the moon, stars and flowers—in her artworks to encourage spiritual contemplation.

In this thesis, I argue that Waller harnessed the decorative and expressive potential of these movements, along with a commitment to Arts and Crafts values, to develop a personal set of symbols that expressed her sense of the spiritual. This encompassed the harmony of word, image and message, which underscored her work. It is for this reason that I locate Waller within the international discourse of spiritual art.

Despite her remarkable talents across media and the distinctive quality of her art, Waller has always occupied a peripheral position within Australian art and art history. Even when she is included in significant books and exhibitions, most often it is in relation to her hand-printed book *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs* (1932) and her relationship with her husband, fellow artist Napier Waller. Key aims of this thesis are to highlight the breadth and depth of Waller’s art practice and to demonstrate that she made important contributions to Australian art and to art that addresses the sacred.

This thesis introduces a number of Waller’s artworks, stories and personal ephemera into scholarship, making a comprehensive study of the artist possible for the first time. It makes a major contribution to scholarship on the artist, especially in relation to the spiritual values that underpinned her practice, as expressed in the key symbols that are identified. By extension, it contributes a more nuanced understanding of art
produced between the First and Second World Wars to Australian art history and to scholarship on art that addresses the sacred.
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THE MOONLIGHT IN THE MIND—
I AM THE LIGHT AT THE END OF EVERY DREAM
THE VOICE CALLING FOR EVER TO COME AWAY
I AM DESIRE BEYOND JOY AND TEARS—\(^1\)

“There are two words printed on my consciousness...Work and God. Everything else must come secondary”.  

Australian artist Christian Waller née Yandell (1894–1954) made this statement in a 1948 interview about her stained glass in the *Woman’s Magazine* supplement of Melbourne newspaper the *Argus*. As it implies, Waller created artworks that unified her aesthetic interests with the spiritual values she yearned to communicate. In this thesis, I argue that Waller’s art was inspired by her spiritual thinking. The development of her artistic and spiritual values was expressed through the evolving decorative expression she harnessed across a range of media: drawing, illustration, watercolour, printmaking, painting, mosaic and stained glass. Her engagement with British Arts and Crafts values regarding the privileging of the handmade work of art and its social function was central to the overall spiritual significance of her work. Waller’s artworks were generally accompanied by—or explicitly responded to—written narratives, with the harmony of word, image and message central to her creative process. In this thesis I demonstrate that the substance and symbolism of her art can only be fully understood through a critical analysis of her *œuvre* that engages with the many different sides of her creative output.

Waller’s *œuvre* was driven by her aim to communicate spiritual values through art. She articulated this towards the end of her life in the newspaper interview from which the earlier quote was obtained: “My life is to get the message through, and I am trying to make religion real”. Her spirituality was a personal fusion of orthodox and alternative spiritual philosophies, namely: Christianity, Theosophy, the Golden Dawn and the International Peace Mission Movement. For this reason, it is crucial to situate her within the Australian and international discourses of spiritual art, as opposed to framing her within the discourse of one spiritual philosophy or art movement. Acting as an emissary, Waller harnessed a range of decorative modes of expression and spiritual philosophies to develop a personal set of symbols that she employed to express her sense of the sacred. I have identified four key symbols that Waller incorporated throughout her art: the sun, the moon, stars and flowers. These were

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3 Christian Marjorie Emily Carlyle Waller née Yandell is referred to as Christian Waller henceforth in this thesis as this was the name she last worked under, following naming conventions of the National Gallery of Australia. She exhibited under her maiden name until 1930; that year she briefly experimented with the surname “Yandell-Waller” before adopting ‘Waller’ personally and professionally. Her friends and family called her ‘Chrissie’, and her husband Napier Waller referred to her as ‘Chris’.
4 Christian Waller, cited in: Westhoven, “She Copes with a Five Year Queue...” p. 3.
complemented by other symbols and the frequent inclusion of images of women with mystical powers.\(^5\) Drawing on Iconographic methodologies, I examine the spiritual significance of these symbols and demonstrate that Waller employed them not simply because of their personal significance, but to encourage spiritual enquiry in the viewer.

My thesis presents the first comprehensive account of Waller’s spiritually-directed œuvre. It contrasts with previous studies on the artist, which, while making valuable contributions to scholarship, have been limited in their scope and focus. They have been confined to exhibition catalogues, survey books, journal articles and single chapters in Master’s and PhD theses. Each of these studies was undertaken by several scholars writing about different aspects of Waller’s art and spiritual interests. Taken together, they have helped build an understanding of Waller’s art practice. They have, however, been inhibited by a range of factors, in particular: the focus on either her artistic or her spiritual interests (rather than appraising these factors equally), factual errors, gender bias, partiality towards certain art media and the failure to engage with the totality of her artistic output. I demonstrate that significant aesthetic, symbolic and spiritual links exist between Waller’s works across different media, as well as the published and unpublished stories she wrote. As such, her art can only be fully understood through an integrative analysis of her whole body of work and her evolving spirituality. This introduction establishes the background to research on Waller, introduces my argument and provides an outline of the chapters that follow.

**Context and Purpose of This Study**

The technical and expressive brilliance of Waller’s art makes it worthy of focused scholarly attention. Despite her remarkable talents across different media, her work has always occupied a peripheral position (if given any position at all) within

\(^5\) Roger Butler first noted the recurrence of powerful women in Waller’s œuvre, specifically in the context of her prints.
Australian art history. A key aim of this thesis is to show that Waller made important contributions to Australian art and to art that addresses the sacred.

Rather than being a peripheral artist, I demonstrate that critics repeatedly praised her artistic abilities during the period when she was working. An example is the National Gallery of Victoria’s decision to purchase a copy of her magnificent printed book *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs* (1932) the year it was published.\(^6\) Reviewers of this book—along with the book illustrations she produced earlier in her career and the stained-glass windows she made from the 1930s—time and again singled out her technical proficiency and the symbolic, decorative expression that gave a striking quality to her works. These reviewers also noted the individual nature of Waller’s art. Despite this critical recognition during her lifetime, following her death in 1954, Waller was absent from Australian art history for more than two decades.

Since the 1970s, Waller has been sporadically incorporated into Australian art history. This has chiefly occurred through two key exhibitions of her art and associated catalogues: *Christian Waller, 1895–1956* [sic]: *Stained Glass Studies, Drawings and Prints* (1978), curated by art historian and curator Roger Butler at the Deutsher Galleries in Armadale, Victoria and the touring exhibition *The Art of Christian Waller* (1992) curated by David Thomas, then Director of the Bendigo Art Gallery.\(^7\) While these exhibitions played important roles in advancing Waller’s artistic reputation, as discussed in Chapter One, the literature contained in the associated catalogues is constrained by its format. Some of her spiritually-directed artworks, have been examined in chapters of both a Master’s and a PhD thesis, but these too focused on part of Waller’s practice.\(^8\)

**Original Contribution**

By reappraising Waller’s creative output, my aim is to reposition her as an important contributor to the dynamism of Australian art and art history during the first half of

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\(^7\) Later Deutscher, when Director Chris Deutscher reintroduced the ‘c’ into his family name.

\(^8\) I refer to the research of Jenny McFarlane and Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger, which is analysed in Chapter One. See: Jenny McFarlane, “Concerning the Spiritual in Melbourne: The Influence of the Theosophical Society on Some Melbourne Artists in the Early Modern Period” (MA, Monash University, 1992); Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger, “Images of Self-Transformation: Occult and Mystical Influences in Australian Art, 1890s–1950s” (PhD, Monash University, 2001).
the twentieth century and to the international discourse of spiritual art. This thesis makes an important contribution to scholarship on the artist through its in-depth analysis, especially of the spiritual values that underpinned her practice, as expressed in the key symbols that are identified. By extension, it contributes a more nuanced understanding of art produced between the First and Second World Wars to Australian art history and to scholarship on art that addresses the sacred. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine the degree to which Waller’s art was able to convey spiritual concepts to viewers.

The location and introduction of a number of Waller’s artworks have been crucial to informing the direction of this comprehensive study. From the outset I have sought out the entirety of Waller’s œuvre and I have located several previously unknown or lost artworks in different media and brought them into discussion for the first time. A key contribution is my documentation of every known stained-glass window Waller created, along with surviving designs and cartoons for stained glass. Most of these windows have never been mentioned, analysed or reproduced in scholarship. Due to their fixed location—mostly within churches in regional Victoria and New South Wales—access to these brilliant examples of Waller’s art is difficult. For this reason, a catalogue raisonné of her stained-glass windows, designs and cartoons is included as Appendix D of this thesis to ensure that her work in this medium is accessible for future scholars.

Three other appendices are included in Volume II that assist in analysing Waller’s creative endeavours and the public display of her art. In Appendix A I have compiled a comprehensive list of exhibitions that featured Waller’s art. Appendix B complements this list and features transcribed entries related to Waller’s prints in the *Waller Printmaking Record Book* (c. 1923–27), an important primary source that survives only through a facsimile and has until now not been included in studies on Waller. Appendix C consists of my transcriptions of unpublished children’s stories Waller wrote during the 1930s. These stories demonstrate that writing was an important mode of creative expression through which Waller sought to communicate her spiritual concerns. Their inclusion in this thesis facilitates an enhanced understanding of this aspect of Waller’s practice.
Research Approach

This research takes a predominately empirical approach that enables an integrative art historical evaluation of Waller’s art. Drawing on several pertinent research methods has facilitated this. Firstly, my analysis of the function and meaning of symbols in Waller’s practice has been achieved by engaging with theories of semiotics, particularly those by Charles Sanders Pierce (1839–1914), Umberto Eco (1932–2016), Mieke Bal (b. 1946) and Norman Bryson (b. 1949). Pierce developed a tripartite system of analysing signs and Eco developed a theory of semiotics that highlights the capacity of signs to represent the non-visible. Eco also concentrated on the ways in which signs function in communication, whereas Bal and Bryson’s methodology of semiotic analysis is grounded in art history and adds a more contemporary perspective to traditional semiotic method of the analysis of signs and symbols within the work of art.9 Together these theories provide a framework for analysing Waller’s use of symbols.

Secondly, I have undertaken visual and iconographic analysis of the entirety of Waller’s œuvre that is currently known to exist. In this approach, I have been guided by theories of iconography by Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) developed for the analysis of narrative and spiritual art, making it particularly suitable to this study.10

Thirdly, the location and analysis of Waller’s artworks and ephemera have been achieved through extensive fieldwork. This has been carried out at collecting institutions, private collections, historic sites and buildings (predominantly churches) where her artworks are located. I also drew on principles of Connoisseurship when comparing her art to that of her husband, Mervyn Napier Waller (1893–1972) to assist in the identification of instances of collaboration.11 Key works by artists who influenced Christian Waller in Australia and overseas are also examined in the body of my thesis. In addition, I retraced a seminal trip she made in 1929–30 to England,

11 Mervyn Napier Waller is referred to as Napier Waller in this thesis as this was the name he last worked under, following naming conventions of the National Gallery of Australia. He sometimes signed and exhibited his work ‘M. Napier Waller’. His friends and family called him ‘Mervyn’, and Christian Waller referred to him as ‘Merv’.
Ireland and Western Europe. Overseas, I sought out key artworks and collections that inspired Waller, in order to better understand the way in which she harnessed these influences to develop her distinctive artistic expression. This research enhanced my knowledge of the international discourse of symbolic spiritual expression that, I argue, Waller contributed to.

My fieldwork included extensive archival research in Australia and overseas. Archives consulted include those related to works on her in public collections, archives at the Waller House and from Waller’s family, as well as relevant material related to key individuals, artistic and spiritual organisations—including the Melbourne Theosophical Society—and artists who had an impact on Waller’s art and vice versa. This has enabled me to: develop a deep understanding of the context surrounding Waller’s artworks, locate scant pieces of personal ephemera (including letters and photographs), correct factual errors and confirm my determination of instances of collaboration between the Wallers.

Fourthly, my research has been informed by interviews I conducted with family members, key scholars and close friends of Waller’s niece, the ceramicist Clytie ‘Klytie’ Pate née Sclater (1912–2010), whom she raised from adolescence. Interview subjects included art historians and curators: David Thomas, Roger Butler, Geoffrey Edwards and Terence Lane. Given the scantness of Waller’s personal ephemera, these interviews have been crucial to my understanding of her art and life.

Fifthly, I have engaged with other disciplines that are central to my research. These include gender studies and literary studies. In the field of gender studies I have engaged with theories of artistic collaboration between heterosexual couples, specifically through examining the archaic concept of the male genius within a heterosexual relationship. I have analysed the ways in which this concept has informed notions of artistic collaboration in Western art history and how it has marginalised the role of women in these partnerships. In addition, I have drawn on methods of close textual analysis in literary studies to examine Waller’s stories as well as the books and poems for which she produced illustrations and otherwise engaged with through her art practice.

Waller’s art is contextualised through discussion of relevant late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century developments in the visual arts and in spiritual expression, in
Australia and overseas. Throughout this thesis, Waller’s artworks are placed in the foreground. Discussion and analysis move from the artworks outwards.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into seven thematic chapters that have been arranged in a general chronology of developments in Waller’s art and life. Exceptions are the first and the final chapter; the first reviews literature on Waller and on the spiritual in art, and the last focuses on the personal set of symbols she used to articulate her sense of the spiritual in her work and to encourage spiritual awareness. This structure allows for the analysis of each phase in Waller’s life and facilitates a deep investigation of how she developed ideas across media over several decades, remaining committed to Arts and Crafts values and the didactic role of art.

Chapter One begins with a critical assessment of extant literature on Waller. It focuses on the ways in which she has been approached in art history, and in studies on alternative spiritual philosophies and religious art. Attention is drawn to the gaps in and limitations of literature on Waller and her spiritually-directed œuvre. I argue that Waller developed ideas across media and drew on a variety of decorative modes of expression as her spiritual thinking evolved. The focus then moves to reviewing literature on art that addresses the sacred, and I ground Waller’s art practice within this tradition. Theories regarding the spiritual impulse in modern art are applied due to their direct relevance to Waller’s art and life. In this chapter I also define key concepts for this research and identify the key symbols—the sun, the moon, stars and flowers—that she employed to express her sense of the sacred.

In Chapter Two I provide the context for Waller’s spiritual and aesthetic interests by focusing on her growth from a juvenile through to a mature artist between 1906 and 1922. An important purpose of this chapter is to raise awareness of the formative influences on Waller’s art and life that foreshadow the trajectory of her art practice; namely her interest in mythology, spirituality, the harmony of word and image, as well as decorative modes of visual expression and the importance of producing art with a message. Waller’s Cornish ancestry and her family ties to orthodox and alternative systems of faith in the (then) colony of Victoria in the second half of the
nineteenth century are discussed, in order to demonstrate how her Celtic heritage informed her approach to spiritual art making. In addition, Waller’s influential engagement with Arts and Crafts values and counter-cultural spiritual philosophies is introduced.

A focus of Chapter Two is the legacy of Waller’s art training on her artistic development. This includes tuition she received at the Castlemaine School of Mines (1905–8), with tutor Hugh Fegan (1908–10), and the National Gallery Art School (1910–14). I put forward the argument that the art tuition Waller received at these schools—focusing on the legacy of the South Kensington system of art education—encouraged her to develop proficiency across media and to engage with historical sources and narratives, including myths and legends. This incorporates the place of sketching in Waller’s art practice, which has not been investigated in previous studies on the artist. Specifically, a visual diary that belonged to Waller—the Bendigo Sketchbook—dating from 1909, which I discovered in a private collection in Victoria, is introduced into scholarship. The Bendigo Sketchbook was kept when an adolescent Waller was studying art in Bendigo. It features extensive notes about ancient Pompeian art and social history, in addition to perspective studies and sketches. The contents reveal an early concern with: the expressive potential of line, pattern and ornament; understanding traditional artistic processes; and a creative and imaginative engagement with symbolism, allegory and history. These concerns were developed through her mature art practice.

In Chapter Three I investigate the importance of book illustration in Waller’s œuvre and introduce some key works into scholarship. The connection between the mystical themes of the books Waller illustrated and her personal engagement with alternative spiritual philosophies is examined. Her embrace of this artistic pursuit signals her early commitment to creating art with a message that was expressed through the harmony of word and image. Waller’s illustrations possess a decorative and symbolic richness that engages both with the narratives she was responding to and her evolving spiritual concerns. Despite the artistic strength of the illustrations she produced for almost twenty books and journals in the 1920s and early 1930s, this aspect of her art practice has been eclipsed by her work in printmaking and stained glass. I argue that her attraction to book illustration directly reflects her embrace of the values of the British Arts and Crafts Movement concerning the integrity of the handmade artwork and the potential for the arts to morally uplift society. Her
illustrations for books written by others, such as those for J. Rupert Atkinson’s *The Renegades* (1921) and Hume Cook’s *Australian Fairy Tales* (1925), foreshadow her employment of symbols within artworks to suggest the path to spiritual enlightenment. Analysis of Waller’s illustrations is contextualised through a focused consideration of the British, European and Australian children’s book illustrators of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries whose work parallels hers.

A key objective of this chapter is to critically assess Waller’s mystical children’s book *The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young* (1932) conceived to communicate spiritual messages to young people. The book has not yet received focused scholarly attention, despite the fact it was entirely written, illustrated, designed and printed lithographically by Waller. Assisted by the original manuscript, which I found in a journal located in a private collection in Victoria, this chapter situates *The Gates of Dawn* within both the Arts and Crafts discourse on book design and the discourse of spiritual art. Parallels are drawn between the book and other children’s stories that engage with alternative spiritual philosophies, such as Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865); an edition of which Waller illustrated in 1924. I argue that Waller’s illustrations are turning points in her artistic maturity, and connect to subsequent developments in the aesthetic and spiritual orientation of her art.

Waller’s engagement with relief printmaking is examined in Chapter Four. I argue that, through this medium, she powerfully expressed her personal sense of the spiritual with greater autonomy than in her commissioned book illustrations. Her transition from illustration to linocut printmaking during the 1920s coincided with her deepening spirituality and her desire to communicate this through her art. This is particularly apparent through analysis of the bookplates and greeting cards she produced for friends and family members, as well as the narrative prints she made.

Focussing on, *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs*, in Chapter Four I also examine the aesthetic and spiritual influences associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival that informed Waller’s printmaking. This includes the international network of creative and spiritual figures with which Waller engaged during her travels overseas in 1929–30. These included the English-Australian illustrator, stained-glass artist and mystic John Brahms ‘J. B.’ Trinick (1890–1974) and the Irish poet, painter and seer George William Russell (1867–1935), the latter known by the pseudonym ‘Æ’. In Australia, Waller also collaborated with English-
born composer Fritz Bennicke Hart (1874–1949) on a poster for two of his operas that were inspired by the Celtic Revival and costumes for another. Like Waller, these creative individuals promoted the importance of creating art with a message. I integrate the influences of Waller’s travels, in particular the mystical, Celtic-themed Theosophical writings of Æ, into an analysis of *The Great Breath*.

Waller’s attraction to the medium of stained glass, which I outline in Chapter Five, arose from her objective to create art of a high artistic standard that also had a spiritual function. Like Waller’s earlier illustrations, bookplates and printed books, this narrative art form combined word and image to achieve its full impact. In this chapter, I investigate the Arts and Crafts foundation of Waller’s approach to stained glass. I argue that she embraced the theories of stained-glass production by the individual practitioner advanced by English artist Christopher Whall (1849–1924) in his seminal treatise *Stained Glass Work* (1905). His legacy, which encouraged practitioners to be adept in all aspects of the design, creation and installation of stained-glass windows, was continued by his daughter Veronica Whall (1887–1967), with whom Waller studied at the firm Whall & Whall Ltd. in London in 1929. Accordingly, Veronica Whall’s influence on Waller’s stained glass is also analysed. In addition, the ecclesiastical stained glass industry in early-twentieth-century Melbourne—which Waller was a part of—is also considered. Particular attention is given to the prolific, independent practitioner William Montgomery (1850–1927), under whom Waller first learnt the art of stained glass.\(^\text{12}\)

In this chapter I also propose that Waller’s experience as an illustrator and a printmaker had a substantial impact on her stained glass as it alerted her to the expressive potential of linework within symbolic compositions. Symbolism and imagery featured in her prints, I demonstrate, can also be found in her stained-glass windows, highlighting the interconnected nature of her works across media. Her more than seventy windows express her spiritual engagement and adoption of Arts and Crafts values of stained glass production. Through close analysis of several key works, this chapter highlights the brilliance of Waller’s stained glass in regard to technical precision, understanding of the fixed architectural nature of the medium and its dependence on the interplay of natural light and coloured glass to achieve its

full impact. In addition, I examine the distinct way in which she combined religious themes with her personal set of symbols to create distinctive, visually arresting windows. These qualities in Waller’s work were praised by Louis Reginald Williams (1890–1980), the prominent ecclesiastical architect active in the state of Victoria in the first half of the twentieth century. The bulk of Waller’s windows are found in Anglican churches Williams designed or modified.\textsuperscript{13} His role in facilitating Waller’s stained glass is also examined in Chapter Five. It is argued that Williams valued the quality of Waller’s stained glass and repeatedly commissioned her to engender spiritual atmospheres within his churches. Correspondence between Waller and Williams which I have located in the State Library Victoria in Melbourne is drawn on to support this argument.

The penultimate chapter, Chapter Six, evaluates Christian and Napier Waller’s collaborative relationship and establishes that Christian Waller contributed to a number of monumental artworks that are currently attributed solely to her husband. Consideration of their collaborative relationship is contextualised through discussion of the paradigm of the artist couple. The prevailing view in art history is that there is room for only one (invariably male) genius within an (invariably heterosexual) artistic couple.\textsuperscript{14} This discussion assists in understanding the historical, gendered context of the established view in Australian art history that Napier Waller significantly influenced his wife’s artistic development, rather than considering her as a talented artist in her own right. This narrow view, moreover, contrasts with the distinctive expression of her \textit{œuvre}, and the marked contrast between her spiritually-directed art and the humanistic aesthetic that underpins Napier Waller’s work.

In Chapter Six I analyse several major works that, I argue, were produced collaboratively by the Wallers, and also correct instances of misattribution. These include the house they designed and decorated in the outer-Melbourne suburb of Ivanhoe (c. 1920–22) and other key collaborative works, including the \textit{Leckie Window} (1935) and the \textit{Myer Mural Hall} (1935). A number of preparatory sketches and primary ephemera provide evidence of Christian Waller’s direct involvement with these major works, and her contribution is now firmly recognised for the first time in this thesis. It is also argued that the presence of Waller’s favoured symbols indicates

\textsuperscript{13} Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” p. 47.

that she sought to infuse spiritual ideas into these predominantly-secular commissions, which include mural schemes, stained-glass windows and mosaics. The aim of this chapter is to redress Christian Waller’s peripheral place within the productive collaborative relationship she and her husband shared in order to facilitate her appropriate recognition in Australian art history.

The way in which Waller channelled her sense of the spiritual into her work through her personal set of symbols is examined in the final chapter, Chapter Seven. Analysis focuses on the stained-glass windows and painted murals produced during the final phase of her life. This analysis is complemented by the introduction of Waller’s personal writings on the spiritual and the sacred, examples of which I have located and introduced into scholarship for the first time. Her observations support my argument that she identified as a spiritual emissary and used her art to encourage spiritual enquiry in the viewer.

A central objective of this chapter is to demonstrate that Waller sought to communicate spiritual values through her art. Her striking and deeply symbolic murals *The Adoration* (1942), produced for Christ Church, Geelong, Victoria and *The Robe of Glory* (1937), produced for the Fawkner Crematorium, Fawkner, Victoria, are critically examined. I analyse the symbolism Waller included in these artworks from an Iconographical perspective and argue her commitment was to producing art with a message.

**Conclusion**

In this thesis, a rich understanding and appreciation of Waller’s art is achieved through an investigation of works across a full range of media, as opposed to consideration of her artworks separately. The expression and imagery in her stained glass have strong parallels with those in the graphic art she produced during the 1920s and 1930s, and highlight the interconnectedness of her artistic output, despite outward changes in terms of media and style. In Chapter One I critically analyse previous scholarship on Waller and provide a context for approaching her art from the discourse of spiritual art.
Chapter One

Approaching the Spiritually-Directed Art of Christian Waller: Literature Review

Figure 1: Marietta Studio, Melbourne, Untitled [Christian Waller], c. 1928, gelatin silver photograph, c. 20.0 x 8.0 cm, John B. Trinick Collection, Ian Potter Museum of Art, Parkville
This chapter introduces the symbolic art of Christian Waller and addresses central issues and themes in her art making that are expanded on in subsequent chapters. In order to establish a scholarly understanding of engagement with Waller’s art to date, I analyse extant literature on her. By taking a chronological approach I highlight advances that have been made and the sporadic scholarly recognition of Waller’s art, whilst also drawing attention to unresolved issues and gaps within the literature. In contrast to previous scholarly interventions, I argue that her work is best understood when analysed in its entirety—and not according to media—and when it is located within the discourse of spiritual art.

Discussion then moves to the discourse of spiritual art and art that addresses the sacred, focusing on the spiritual philosophies that informed Waller’s practice. This is also done chronologically with regard to historical developments and the order in which Waller engaged with certain systems of belief. Key spiritual philosophies are defined, as are the principal methodologies for this research, namely those of Iconography, Iconology, Semiotics and Connoisseurship. Waller’s place in the Australian and international discourse of spiritual art is established. An important objective of this chapter is to demonstrate how this thesis fills significant gaps, corrects factual errors and examines her whole artistic output and the spiritual values that underpinned it.

On Christian Waller: A Critical Assessment of Extant Scholarship

Although Waller’s œuvre involved drawing, illustration, printmaking, stained glass, mosaic and painting—it has received limited scholarly attention. The fact that her most substantial output—in terms of volume—was produced in ecclesiastical stained glass, which, due to its fixed nature, is unable to be fully represented in exhibitions and collections, has made a complete appreciation of her artistic output challenging. Her under-representation is addressed by critically analysing each phase of her œuvre and highlighting the ways in which she developed ideas across media.

Waller’s artistic gifts first set her apart from fellow artists when she was a teenager. In 1909 as a teenager studying under art tutor Hugh Fegan, two of her
paintings were selected for exhibition in Bendigo and, the following year, in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{15} A public campaign was launched in Bendigo—with the support of the Mayor—to raise funds to send her to the National Gallery Art School in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{16} She went on to study drawing under Frederick McCubbin (1855–1917) and painting under Lindsay Bernard Hall (1859–1935) at the School between 1910 and 1914.\textsuperscript{17} This early recognition shows that her talent and distinctive artistic expression was recognised from her youth.

The next phase of Waller’s career saw her employ dynamic line and decorative expression to create original illustrations that increasingly reflected her engagement with mysticism and spiritual symbols. Her artistic gifts led to a string of commissions for commercial and book illustrations after she completed her studies at the School in 1914. Her strong graphic prowess and striking use of symbolism were repeatedly singled out in reviews of exhibitions she participated in from 1913 through to the 1920s, namely through the Victorian Artists’ Society.\textsuperscript{18} In 1920, one of her pen and ink drawings, \textit{Merlin and Nimue} [Figure 2] was one of only eleven works illustrated out of three-hundred-and-ninety-six works in the catalogue produced for the Society’s \textit{Annual Autumn Exhibition}.\textsuperscript{19}

Reviews that referenced Waller’s work from this time, however, frequently included gendered language and displayed a patronising attitude towards the decorative

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{merlin_and_nimue.png}
\caption{Merlin and Nimue, c. 1920, whereabouts unknown}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{15} “Bendigo Art Gallery: Committee Meeting,” Bendigo Advertiser 6 July 1909, p. 4; “Painting in Oils: Promising Castlemaine Student,” Mount Alexander Mail 26 November 1909, p. 3; “A Rising Child Artist (Miss Christian Yandell) and Her Pictures,” Bendigonian 7 December 1909, p. 13;
\textsuperscript{16} Thomas and Jordan, “Chronology,” p. 12.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
sensibilities and so-called ‘imaginative’ narratives of her art; most of which were executed in the form of pen and ink drawings and watercolours. She was, in addition, frequently referred to as “Mrs Napier Waller” despite the fact she exhibited under her maiden name of Yandell prior to 1930; articles about her husband’s art, by contrast, rarely mentioned his artist-wife.\(^{20}\) This reflects gender attitudes of the era, which coloured Waller’s career. For example, in a review of the 1919 Federal Exhibition of the South Australian Society of Arts, held in Adelaide, an unnamed reporter made the following observation:

> There are several examples of the work of Bombardier M. N. Waller; and … the catalogue brings the visitor to some admirable pencil drawings by the soldier artist’s talented wife, who signs her pictures Christian Yandell.\(^{21}\)

Attitudes such as this, along with a misunderstanding of her engagement with mystical narratives and use of symbolism, dominate critical appreciation of her work.

By the 1930s Waller was a well-recognised artist on the Melbourne art scene. When she created *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs* in 1932, a photograph of her proudly making the work by hand on her Victorian-era hand-printing press was reproduced in the *Herald* (Melbourne) [Figure 3] and the *Mail* (Adelaide) newspapers.\(^{22}\) The work was reviewed by prominent artists and critics, Blamire

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20 The below articles make no mention of Christian Waller:
She was mentioned in a profile written by Edward Alexander Vidler, who was a great supporter of her art.
Young (1862–1935), Harold Herbert (1891–1945) and George Bell (1878–1966) for the Herald, the Australasian and the Sun News Pictorial newspapers respectively. The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) acquired a copy of the book in 1932, which demonstrated that the high artistic standard of this work was immediately recognised.

Waller’s introduction into art historical scholarship occurred at this productive stage in her career. However, recognition of her artistic accomplishments was persistently overshadowed by those of her more prominent artist husband. In William Moore’s (1868–1937) landmark publication The Story of Australian Art (1934), she was described as being “well known for her imaginative drawings and lino-cuts”. Moore’s observation here highlights the fact that, during the 1930s, Waller’s art was well regarded by leading critics like himself; however, his failure to mention her work in stained glass signals that this medium was not regarded as highly as printmaking and drawing. When briefly listing her in the section entitled “Dictionary of Australian Art and Artists” he cited her as “Yandell, Christian” and noted in parentheses that she is “Mrs Waller”. This effectively linked her achievements to her marital status, as Moore subtly informs the reader that she is married to Napier Waller, whose own much longer entry appears a few pages before hers. This occurrence is not confined to the 1930s; it continues to pervade scholarship on Waller.

Waller’s artistic reputation declined during the 1940s and 1950s. Earlier in the 1940s her work in stained glass is mentioned in numerous short newspaper articles, yet this waned over the decade. Her interview in the Argus was only the second time she was the subject of a large editorial. Plagued by health problems and no longer producing art suitable for exhibition Waller’s art gradually slipped off the radar of the

26 The absence of her stained glass from Moore’s publication may have been compounded by the fact much of the text was written in the 1920s, before Waller was known as an independent stained-glass artist.
27 Moore also fails to list her address, yet notes in Napier Waller’s entry that he lived at “Fairy Hills, Ivanhoe”. Moore, The Story of Australian Art: From the Earliest Known Art of the Continent to the Art of to-Day, vol. 2, pp. 228, 34.
28 The first was the 1909 campaign to raise money to support her art education. “A Castlemaine Artist: Public Appreciation in Bendigo,” Mount Alexander Mail 30 November 1909, p. 2.
Melbourne art scene that she had contributed to. When she died in 1954, the newspaper notice in the personal section of the Argus made no mention of her artistic achievements; her death certificate listed her occupations as “home duties”.

It would take another two decades for her to start being reappraised by art historians.

Since the 1970s, Waller has been slowly reintroduced into Australian art history, receiving sporadic attention in exhibitions and associated catalogues. In 1976 her print The Sorceress (1922) was reproduced in curator Nicholas Draffin’s book Australian Woodcuts and Linocuts of the 1920s and 1930s, and her work in the linocut medium was discussed. Six of her prints were featured in the landmark exhibition Outlines of Australian Printmaking, curated by Ron Radford, Director of the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery (now Ballarat Art Gallery), in 1976. Radford acquired eleven prints for the institution that year and gradually developed a large collection over the next few years. The following year Klytie Pate organised the publication of The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young (1932) for the first time and, in 1978, had of The Great Breath re-published through the Gryphon Books.

Two key exhibitions of Waller’s art have been integral to this reintroduction. In 1978 her first solo exhibition, Christian Waller, 1895–1956 [sic]: Stained Glass Studies, Drawings and Prints was held at the Deutsher Galleries in Armadale, Victoria. The exhibition was drawn almost entirely from Pate’s collection, who was instrumental in establishing Waller’s legacy. It was curated by Butler who also compiled the modest

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29 Waller did exhibit designs and cartoons for stained glass in 1934, but there is no evidence that she exhibited completed windows. See Appendix A for more information.


32 See Appendix A for more information about the exhibition. In the exhibition catalogue Radford thanked Draffin for allowing him to look at his then unpublished book Australian Woodcuts and Linocuts of the 1920s and 1930s. As such, it is likely that Draffin first reintroduced Waller into Australian art history and alerted Radford to her art.


yet insightful catalogue.36 Fourteen years later, a larger touring exhibition The Art of Christian Waller (1992) was curated by Thomas.37 It also included works from Pate’s collection and those she gifted to various institutions, a sign of her key role in advancing recognition of her aunt’s work.38 The exhibition was shown at the Bendigo Art Gallery and the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in 1992 and the following year it toured to the Hamilton Art Gallery, in Victoria, and the Australian National Gallery (now National Gallery of Australia) in Canberra.39 Each of these exhibitions included more than one hundred and fifty examples of Waller’s drawings, illustrations, paintings and prints. Her stained glass and murals were represented through preliminary designs due to the fixed nature of these art forms. The work Waller produced collaboratively with her husband was absent.

Until now the catalogue for The Art of Christian Waller exhibition was the most significant publication on Waller and her art. It featured a biographical overview and a chronology of her life by Thomas along with an annotated list of works exhibited. Three critical essays were also included in The Art of Christian Waller: Butler on Waller’s graphic art, art historian Caroline Miley on Waller’s stained glass and Draffin on the symbolic parallels between the art of Christian and Napier Waller.40 Despite containing significant analysis of Waller’s art, the catalogue for The Art of Christian Waller is constrained in its appraisal of her œuvre. This is due to the fact that each essay is limited to a few pages.

Since The Art of Christian Waller was exhibited, previously unknown works by Waller have come to light. This has occurred particularly following the death of Pate in 2010 and the subsequent dispersion of her extensive collection of Waller’s artworks and

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36 The show came about following the Deutsher Galleries exhibition A Survey of Australian Relief Prints: 1900–1950 from 13 April–5 May 1978, in which Waller’s prints from Pate’s collection were exhibited. Waller’s solo exhibition was held from 8th–30th September that year.

37 Another exhibition, Christian Waller from Klytie Pate, was mounted at the Ballarat Art Gallery in 2011. This small exhibition, curated by Anne Rowland, was not accompanied by a publication. See Appendix A for more information about the exhibition.


39 See Appendix A for further information about the exhibition.

30 Draffin wrote a monograph on Napier Waller and through the process became alerted to the fact the Wallers collaborated on major projects.
ephemera through bequests and auctions. I introduce these works into scholarship and present a more nuanced analysis of Waller’s art than previously possible.

Although Waller’s art has been included in survey books and various exhibitions of Australian art over the past four decades, her significance remains under examined. Her work is absent from, or glanced over in, many key publications that relate directly to aspects of her practice. Indeed, Waller’s art is not mentioned in numerous important Australian art historical texts, including those related to religious and spiritual art. Remarkably, given the quality of her work in stained glass, she is also absent from the two seminal books on Australian stained glass. Her absence demonstrates that many art historians do not consider her a significant Australian artist or that they are unfamiliar with her work.

Even when Waller is included in significant books and exhibitions, such as Janine Burke’s *Australian Women Artists: 1840–1940* (1980), Kirsty Grant’s *In Relief: Australian Wood Engravings, Woodcuts and Linocuts* (1997), Andrew Sayers’ *Australian Art* (2001) and Anna Clabburn’s *Looking for Faeries: The Victorian Tradition* (2010), she generally receives only a passing reference. Most often this is in relation to designs for *The Great Breath* and her relationship with Napier Waller. The rest of her *œuvre* is rarely mentioned or examined.

Prominent exceptions indicate that Christian Waller’s art is worthy of a more distinguished position in histories of Australian art. In his publication *Australian Decorative Arts 1820s–1990s: Art Gallery of South Australia* (1996), art historian and curator Christopher Menz praised Waller’s stained glass and singled her out as “The

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41 Art historian and curator Geoffrey Edwards, as an Executor of Pate’s estate, played a central role in this process. Edwards. “Geoffrey Edwards Interviewed by Grace Blakeley-Carroll.”


most prominent and outstanding stained glass practitioner” of the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{46} Despite this, only one of her works is examined in this book, which reflects the fact that it is a survey text and many artists are by necessity included.\textsuperscript{47}

In \emph{Printed: Images by Australian Artists 1885–1955} (2007), Butler highlighted the strength of \emph{The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young} as well as \emph{The Great Breath}. Each of Waller’s prints for \emph{The Great Breath} and two additional prints are reproduced in the book, signifying her important place in the history of Australian printmaking.\textsuperscript{48} Art historian Sasha Grishin, in \emph{Australian Art: A History} (2013), referred to the complex Christian symbolism in Waller’s stained glass that was executed in what he described as a distinctive Art Deco manner.\textsuperscript{49} He also touched on some of the reasons why she has been overlooked in Australian art history.\textsuperscript{50} Grishin made no mention of any of Waller’s prints or illustrations—including \emph{The Great Breath}—and cited stained glass as her greatest achievement.

Waller’s art has been examined by three scholars in PhD and Master’s theses since the early 1990s. Jenny McFarlane and Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger each pursued a thematic engagement with Waller’s art, while Bronwyn Hughes has concentrated on her stained glass. McFarlane and Sarmiala-Berger have examined the Theosophical and occult symbolism in Waller’s art, particularly in graphic art—namely \emph{The Great Breath}—for research projects that took a wider view of these influences in Australian art.\textsuperscript{51}

The final chapter of McFarlane’s Master’s thesis, \emph{Concerning the Spiritual in Melbourne: The Influence of the Theosophical Society on Some Melbourne Artists in the Early Modern Period} (1992) focused on the Theosophical influences on Waller’s \emph{The Great Breath}.\textsuperscript{52} The chapter formed the basis of a 1993 journal article.\textsuperscript{53} McFarlane asserted that Waller

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\textsuperscript{46} Christopher Menz, \emph{Australian Decorative Arts 1820s–1990s: Art Gallery of South Australia} (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 1996), p. 82.

\textsuperscript{47} Menz also wrote an insightful article about Waller’s stained-glass, focusing on the window, \textit{Prophet Isaiah, Apostle St Peter, Sundar Singh} (1936) that was acquired by the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1996, where he worked as the Associate curator of European and Australian Decorative Arts.

\textsuperscript{48} The additional prints are \textit{Morgan le Fay} (c. 1927) and \textit{Untitled [Endpapers for “The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young”]}, 1932.

\textsuperscript{49} One of her finest stained-glass windows, \textit{St Peter’s Sermon on the Morning of the Pentecost} (1936) was reproduced.

\textsuperscript{50} Grishin, \emph{Australian Art: A History}, p. 217.


\textsuperscript{52} See: McFarlane, “Concerning the Spiritual in Melbourne: The Influence of the Theosophical Society on Some Melbourne Artists in the Early Modern Period.”

produced *The Great Breath* in response to the urgent need identified by the Theosophical Society to create a new form of Australian art to articulate the values of what Theosophists considered to be the imminent new spiritual age (which they believed would emerge in Australia). While I acknowledge the significance of McFarlane’s research, in contrast I argue that Waller, while motivated to encourage others to participate in spiritual enquiry, did not identify as a Theosophist and that her art was addressed to humanity rather than a specific Australian audience.

Meanwhile, Sarmiala-Berger analysed Waller’s graphic art in a chapter of her PhD thesis *Images of Self-Transformation: Occult and Mystical Influences in Australian Art, 1890s–1950s* (2001). The thesis examined the influence of what Sarmiala-Berger termed the “mystico-occult” on Australian art during the period 1890–1950. Waller’s art is one of four case studies of the thesis and was analysed in the fourth chapter, entitled “Christian Yandell Waller: *The Great Breath* and Other Esoteric Works”. She concentrated on what Butler identified as the representation of “women of power” in Waller’s art, and drew links between imagery of witches and fairies in her early work and her engagement with mysticism. As with McFarlane’s research, Sarmiala-Berger directed the bulk of her analysis to *The Great Breath*.

Waller’s substantial achievements in stained glass have been recognised by Australian stained-glass historian Bronwyn Hughes in both her Masters and PhD Theses. In her 1997 Master’s Thesis, Hughes claimed that Waller was one of Australia’s leading stained glass practitioners and included seven illustrations of her stained-glass windows, which are analysed in the text. Attention was drawn to the dynamic linework, rich use of colour and distinct interpretation of religious narratives that characterise Waller’s windows. In a section in Chapter Eight “Christian and Napier Waller and Australian Modernism”, Hughes discussed the parallels between the Wallers’ stained glass and how this has caused a number of Christian Waller’s windows—although signed—to be attributed to her husband. She flagged that the

54 Ibid., p. 124.
55 See: Sarmiala-Berger, “Images of Self-Transformation: Occult and Mystical Influences in Australian Art, 1890s–1950s.”
56 Ibid., p. ii.
57 The other case studies are: Charles Douglas Richardson, Roy de Maistre and Rosaleen Norton. See: ibid.
59 Bronwyn Hughes, “Twentieth Century Stained Glass in Melbourne Churches” (MA, University of Melbourne, 1997), p. 43.
60 Ibid., pp. 98–99.
61 Ibid., pp. 97–98.
collaborative glasswork of Christian and Napier Waller is worthy of further research, something I undertake in Chapter Six.\(^\text{62}\)

Hughes included Waller’s work in subsequent research into Australian stained glass. In the CD-ROM \textit{Lights of Our Past: Australia's Historic Stained Glass} (1999) and the booklet \textit{Shining Lights, Ethereal Visions: Stained Glass in Frankston City} (2009), a number of Waller’s windows are reproduced and analysed for the first time.\(^\text{63}\) In her PhD Thesis, Hughes outlined the circumstances that led Waller to take up the medium of stained glass, initially under the tutelage of William Montgomery.\(^\text{64}\) Most recently, Hughes discussed the exceptional quality of Waller’s stained glass in an article for the State Library Victoria’s \textit{La Trobe Journal}.\(^\text{65}\) She has shown a deep understanding of Waller’s glass. Her scholarship has not included Waller’s prints and illustrations.

In 1985 Waller’s illustrations were discussed in the article “The Prints and Prose of Christian Waller” by librarian Margaret Zerner. It provided a survey of Waller’s graphic output.\(^\text{66}\) Focus was given to the technical production of the original copy of \textit{The Gates of Dawn} and the facsimile edition published in the 1970s. Zerner’s piece does include useful information about the key events in Waller’s life.

The originality of \textit{The Gates of Dawn} was acknowledged by scholar of Australian illustrated children’s books Juliet O’Conor in her 2009 book. Two illustrations and the cover of the 1977 hardcover edition were reproduced in O’Conor’s publication with two pages and a paragraph of text devoted to Waller and these illustrations.\(^\text{67}\) O’Conor provided a brief history of Waller’s contributions to Australian children’s book illustration, and did not analyse \textit{The Gates of Dawn}; other than comment on the parallels between the strong lines in the illustrations and Waller’s ecclesiastical-stained-glass windows.\(^\text{68}\) Nonetheless, the inclusion of the book and some

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\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 3.
\(^{64}\) Hughes, “Designing Stained Glass for Australia 1887–1927: The Art and Professional Life of William Montgomery” (PhD, University of Melbourne, 2007), pp. 231–32.
\(^{67}\) One illustration is of Thomas the cat and the other features Thomas and the Daughter of the Sun with Christopher when Christopher has transformed into a man.
illustrations, indicates that it is held in high regard by an expert on Australian children’s literature.

In 2015 literary scholar Michael Organ published two articles on some of Waller’s book illustrations. He discussed Waller’s talent as an illustrator and provided brief analysis of the illustrations. Organ’s focus centred on the books themselves rather than their place in Waller’s broader art practice, something I analyse in Chapter Three.

Waller’s under-representation in Australian art history, I conclude, has been maintained by four key factors. Firstly, because spiritual art has not been a popular theme within the discourse. Secondly, due to the fact her collaborative relationship with her husband has not been properly recognised. Thirdly, because the themes of her art and the media in which she worked do not fit within the dominant themes of Australia art history. And fourthly, owing to the fact she herself did not actively pursue critical and commercial acclaim, particularly from the mid-1930s, instead seeking to act as a spiritual emissary for the greater good of humankind; especially from the 1930s onwards. It is for this reason that I locate Waller within the discourse of spiritual art.

Approaching Spiritual in Art: A Theoretical and Art Historical Framework

Waller’s motivation to communicate her spiritual values through her art practice places her within a rich tradition of spiritually-directed artists. Christianity was a foundational influence on her practice. The spiritual direction of her art was intensified by virtue of her engagement with alternative spiritual philosophies, including Theosophy, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the International Peace Mission Movement. A considerable number of artworks she produced include imagery and symbols that show a deep engagement with them. In


70 Thomas touched on this factor in his opening essay in The Art of Christian Waller catalogue.

this section I analyse these philosophies and their influence on modern artists in Australia and overseas, focusing on Waller.

My use of the term ‘spiritual’ throughout this thesis encompasses the variety of mystical and religious influences Waller drew on. It reflects contemporary approaches to art that address the sacred and is a term Waller herself used.71 In his 2006 book, *Art of the Sacred: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and Belief*, Graham Howes devoted a chapter to discussing the shift from describing art as ‘religious’ to labelling it ‘spiritual’. He argued that this has been occurring since 1750 and accelerated in the twentieth century.72 In part, this shift has taken place because ‘spirituality’ has many connotations separate from organised religions, and is seen by some scholars as a more flexible term that allows for individual interpretations.73 Given the breadth of Waller’s religious, mythological, mystical and occult interests, the term ‘spiritual’ is pertinent for a study of her art.

Before progressing, it is necessary to define the key term ‘spiritual’ in the context of this research. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines the adjective ‘spiritual’ as: “Of or relating to, affecting or concerning, the spirit or higher moral qualities, esp. as regarded in a religious aspect”.74 Art historian Roger Lipsey argued that ‘spiritual’ relates to the act of looking beyond the material world and more deeply within ourselves.75 In *A Sociology of Religion* (2016), Peter R. Holmes gave the following definition of spirituality:

> The human search for meaning, particularly relationally, and that for many today this incorporates a supernatural/ corporeal dimension that suggests many of us have discovered we are more than our physical biology.76

In her 2015 book *The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art*, art historian Charlene Spretnak suggested that: “The cosmos is infused with an unfolding dynamic of becoming and a unitive dimension of being. Spirituality is the awareness of and engagement with

71 Waller referred to the important of “Spiritual leaders” in a letter to her friend Ian Hanna, which is discussed later in the chapter. See: Christian Waller to Ian Hanna, March 1940, Papers of Ian Hanna, MS 12896. State Library Victoria, Melbourne.
that unity and those dynamics”. The above meanings link ‘spiritual’ to the concept of being connected to a higher moral quality and search for meaning that is outside of the physical body. Indeed, prominent psychoanalyst and mystic Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) referred to ‘spirit’ as referring to the immaterial, and, in its highest meaning refers to the concept of God. These meanings all hint at the notion of transcendence: of transcending the physical body and the material world. Given that Waller was particularly influenced by religious and mystical ideas, I define spiritual as: referring to qualities that exist in a higher realm beyond the material world, and further, that engagement with these qualities suggests a divine unity that is attained through wisdom and awareness.

This definition of ‘spiritual’ is informed by visual analysis of the formal and symbolic qualities of Waller’s art and is complemented by my analysis of her personal ephemera—such as a diary and letters. In her stained glass, for example, she repeatedly showed a single figure moving upwards and out of the picture plane. This signals that they are approaching a higher realm that can only be accessed by virtue of attaining spiritual wisdom. The 1936 baptistery window, *St Peter’s Sermon on the Morning of Pentecost*, in the Littlejohn Memorial Chapel, Scotch College, Hawthorn, Victoria, exemplifies this approach [Figure 4]. In letters, writings and interviews she often referred to God and alluded to the fact that she was attempting to access a higher dimension and inspire others to do likewise.

Spiritual art has strong links with systems of belief and is employed for its capacity to articulate the non-visible, namely the transcendent. For believers, the sacred or holy nature of spiritual and religious ideas and beliefs renders them worthy of artistic treatment. Art often serves either a didactic or a meditative function, reinforcing and allowing for explorations of faith. As such, faith underpins spiritual belief, and art is a

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79 Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” p. 46.
key tool employed by artists and to encourage faith in spiritual systems. In *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory* (2005), visual culture theorist David Morgan, argued that seeing spiritual art cultivates a sacred gaze. As he explained: “a sacred gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance.” The central thesis of Morgan’s book is that the most effective method of examining religious images is through focussing on ways of seeing. He argued that religious visual culture is mediated between the individual and systems of belief. Rather than defining belief as passed on through creedal concepts, Morgan maintained that belief is an individual conviction developed from both spiritual and religious systems, cultural influences and personal experiences. He went on to claim that belief is something humans share through ceremonies, rituals and visual practices. This definition of belief is useful for understanding Waller’s personal sense of the spiritual and her motivation to communicate it through her art practice.

The relationship between art and faith is the bedrock of spiritual practices across the world, including orthodox and occult systems of belief. In *Christian Art* (2007) art historian Rowena Loverance drew attention to the commonalities between art and faith:

One of the paradoxes of faith is that it is both handed down in a living tradition and must also be known and felt as a new experience… The same is true of responses to art. An art tradition is created by many hands, broken, remoulded and handed down. Viewers respond, drawing not only on their knowledge of the tradition, but also on their personal experience.

Spiritual art, then, is a mediator between the secular and temporal realms. It can serve as both a call to arms and a mediator to accessing the non-visible. It is a form of visual communication, a function Waller’s art served.

The didactic impulse of spiritual and religious art has been a key influence on global artistic practices including the development of Christian stained glass. Loverance has argued that Christianity possesses the strongest artistic tradition of world religions.
It has been driven by visual imagery since the third century CE. In medieval Europe art was often used as a visual aid in Christian places of worship; the medium of stained glass was invented for this purpose in the tenth century. The decoration of illuminated books also came about to reflect the sacred themes they explored.

Stained glass was developed with the purpose of cultivating spiritual atmospheres within churches and bringing viewers into contact with the sacred. Narrative pictures of the windows taught Biblical stories to parishioners, most of whom were illiterate. In windows, or the openings in architectural structures that function as a means of allowing light into the buildings, humankind has long placed objects and symbols that inform the onlooker of the building’s function. Stained glass is a non-tactile, two-dimensional art form that is generally suspended above the viewer’s line of sight. These conditions—when met with a properly crafted window—work together to give the illusion of an open and floating design, making the heavy Mullions and leadlines disappear and surrounding the edge of the window with a halo of glowing light. This phenomenon of ‘halation’, or the phenomenon that spreads light around the church, obscures the architectural spaces that surround and divide the window, and makes the window appear larger than it actually is. In short, this means a successful stained-glass window emanates from its architectural frame and appears to dominate the space within the church, disseminating glowing and soft light by virtue of its illumination. These circumstances contribute to the spiritual atmosphere of the church and have the potential to encourage devotion in the onlooker.

Clearly, then, one of the primary functions of spiritual art is to convey meaning and to encourage devotion. The effectiveness of the work of art in this regard is dependent on several factors, including: the artistic standard; the clarity of the

85 Ibid., p. 24.
86 Medieval stained glass, like other forms of religious and spiritual art, was made by anonymous craftspeople (almost exclusively male) and was commissioned by patrons and church leaders; craftspeople did not necessarily have a personal spiritual engagement with the work they made. Virginia Chieffo Raguin, The History of Stained Glass: The Art of Light Medieval to Contemporary, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), pp. 56–83.
87 The art of illumination—developed when books were copied by hand—also served to lighten the page, in a similar manner to the way in which stained glass modified light entering the church. James Bettley, ed. The Art of the Book: From Medieval Manuscript to Graphic Novel (London: V&A Publications, 2001), p. 14.
90 Ibid., p. 20.
message conveyed; and the viewer’s receptiveness to experiencing spiritual art. As scholar of Christian art, Jane Dillenberger, articulated:

when we are willing to receive the meaning of the work of art in accordance with the artist’s vision, we experience an exhilarating expansion of understanding. Momentarily, we see with the artist’s eye, and feel with his [or her] pulsebeat. This moment is a truly creative interval for the beholder.91

Dillenberger’s observation highlights the relationship between the viewer and the artist. The degree to which the viewer absorbs the mystical themes of the work of art depends upon their willingness to receive the spiritual messages. The viewer’s personal sense of the spiritual informs this engagement, as does their cultural background. This goes some way to explaining why Waller targeted her art to platforms that were already associated with didacticism: books and stained-glass windows.

Some of the earliest texts on stained glass explicitly link the art form to a transcendental spiritual experience. This is seen in the writings of influential patron of Gothic architecture and stained glass, Abbot Suger (c. 1081–1151):

I see myself dwelling in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of heaven; and that, by the Grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner … transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial.92

In this statement, the architectural environment and the artworks within the church are not mentioned, yet the existence of these properties facilitates the mystical experience Suger described. In essence, he is articulating the highest aim of spiritual art: the ability to facilitate access to the immaterial, spiritual realm and for the artwork to appear secondary to the ideas it conjures. Gothic churches, where such windows were first installed in the Middle Ages, also featured architectural elements that were designed to facilitate spiritual contemplation.93

92 Suger popularised the Gothic style of stained glass in Europe through ecclesiastical art and architecture. He engaged with Theophilus Presbyter’s treatise on stained glass, *De diversa artibus* (*On Various Arts*, c. 1100–1120), when he oversaw the window adornment of Church in Saint-Denis in greater Paris, France, which he had rebuilt between 1137 and 1154. He also restored the Church as the tomb of the French Monarchy. The building was completed posthumously.


Spiritual Expression, Symbols and the Work of Art: The Modern Period

Since the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, spiritually-directed artists have increasingly produced art that addresses a personal sense of the sacred. As Howes has shown, prior to the mid-eighteenth century, the majority of this art was religious in orientation. Spretnak linked the rise of spiritual art with a rejection of the mechanistic worldview that had gained prominence by the start of the nineteenth century. The mechanised worldview, she argued, developed from Renaissance humanism, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. It contributed to the secularisation of Western society. Some prominent spiritually-directed artists engaged with this zeitgeist by producing art that incorporated innovative modes of visual and aesthetic expression to communicate a personal sense of the sacred. Waller’s art emerged from this international discourse of spirituality and modern art in Western society.

From the mid-eighteenth century, Western artists have moved away from a doctrinaire approach to religious art to express the sacred in distinctive ways. Waller was one artist who participated in an international dialogue of spiritual art. This consisted of those who came before her, including English poet and artist William Blake (1757–1827). He produced illuminated books of poetry that combined word and image to express a singular sense of the sacred that departed from orthodox tradition. Inspired by medieval illuminated manuscripts, Blake set about writing, illustrating and printing his books. He expressed a pantheistic vision of the sacred in his works, which are amongst the most celebrated examples of Western spiritual art. In his book The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (c. 1789–90), he prophesised unity of the physical and the spiritual worlds, and argued that the body and soul of human beings should not be treated as separate entities. He also challenged the authority of

94 Ibid., p. 131.
95 Spretnak, The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art: Art History Reconsidered 1800 to the Present, p. 17.
96 Loverance, Christian Art, p. 45.
98 Particularly in his earliest illuminated works All Religions are One and There is No Natural Religion (1788). Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, eds., Blake’s Poetry and Designs, 2nd ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), p. 3.
master narratives of good and evil, and encouraged spiritual and moral exploration.\textsuperscript{99} When he wrote that “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear/ to man as it is, infinite” he linked spirituality with wisdom.\textsuperscript{100} This is something that also characterised alternative spiritual philosophies that informed Waller’s art practice.

Blake’s exploration of the unity of spirituality through image and text foreshadowed the way in which Waller addressed the sacred—in particular through her printed books—more than one hundred years later. Blake devised a system of creating ‘illuminated’ books of poetry, inscribing his text and drawing images (in reverse) on copper plates and then printed etchings from the plates.\textsuperscript{101} Waller’s attempt to print \textit{The Gates of Dawn} (1932) in a similar manner using lithography—touché on zinc plates—can be seen as a modern attempt at creating an illuminated book.

Like Waller, Blake made personal interpretations of Biblical narratives through word and image. In his well-known etching with watercolour \textit{The Ancient of Days Setting a Compass to the Earth} from the illuminated book \textit{Europe a Prophecy} (1794) [Figure 5], he depicted his mythic character Urizen in a manner akin to the Christian God (an elderly yet physically strong man with white hair and beard) kneeling in front of a blazing sun. He holds a large golden compass in his left hand and appears to be measuring the space below, beyond the picture plane. Rather than a figure of good, Urizen represents the imperfections of the Christian concept of God, with the narrative of \textit{Europe a Prophecy}, like \textit{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell}, encouraging a

\textsuperscript{101} Johnson and Grant, \textit{Blake’s Poetry and Designs}, p. xiii.
spiritual awakening. His break away from orthodox religious imagery had a major impact on subsequent developments in spiritual art that were also fuelled by modernism.

Indeed, as Loverance identified, the advent of modernism in the arts in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century freed artists like Blake from orthodox Christian imagery and facilitated personal responses to spiritual beliefs and values. Emerging in the mid-nineteenth century, Pre-Raphaelitism was also motivated by a desire to spiritually renew the arts. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was formed in England in 1848 by a group of artists and poets. They looked to the Italian Renaissance painter and architect Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, 1483–1520) and the art that came before him for inspiration, rejecting mechanised approaches to painting in favour of the study of nature and the creation of art imbued with personal feeling. After the initial wave of Pre-Raphaelitism that was forged by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848–53), subsequent proponents of the movement embraced Medievalism and Celtic legends in their spiritually charged rejection of modernity. Its influence was felt in Australia, facilitated by a member of the Brotherhood Thomas Woolner (1825–92) and associate Bernhard Smith (1820–1885), who migrated to Melbourne in the 1850s. In colonial Australia, however, the movement was not as critically regarded as it was in Europe and America due to the preference for *plein air* painting. As is discussed in Chapters Five and Six, Pre-Raphaelitism had a significant influence on Waller’s artistic orientation, particularly from her youth through to the late-1920s. It is exemplary of what Spretnak has identified as a culture of disenchantment with the secularisation of society. Pre-Raphaelites, like other artistic visionaries including the German Romantic painters, the Nazarenes and the Impressionists, sought to remain modern, yet were aware of the spiritual losses that had come about by virtue of industrialisation and secularisation.

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102 Ibid., p. 96.
103 Loverance, *Christian Art*, p. 49.
106 Critical disregard for the movement continued into the twentieth century.
From the mid-nineteenth century several artistic movements emerged that had both a spiritual and a Socialist orientation. These included the Arts and Crafts Movement, which reached a peak of influence in Britain in the 1880s and in Australia from this period up until the First World War. It privileged the traditional methods of artistic practices from the past, in particular medieval England. This encompassed the narratives and myths associated with this time period, namely the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Emerging in England, the Arts and Crafts Movement advocated simplicity and ‘truth to materials’ in promoting social regeneration through the embrace of traditional medieval art, design, literature and ideology. Amongst the leading proponents of the movement were artist, writer and Socialist William Morris (1834–96) and stained-glass artist and teacher Christopher Whall (1849–1929); Morris and Whall’s influence on Waller is examined in the chapters that follow. Waller brought a strong spiritual dimension to her personal engagement with Arts and Crafts values in the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Also flourishing in the second half of the nineteenth century was engagement with alternative spiritual enquiry. Historian Alex Owen has written extensively on this phenomenon, focussing on Spiritualism in the British context, which informed its rise of the phenomenon in Australia. Interest in Spiritualism and other occult practices was particularly popular in Britain, reaching a peak of influence in the second half of the nineteenth century. This has been identified as a response to the Industrial Revolution that had mushroomed in England. Another influence was the controversial theories of evolution contributed by English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–1882). His publication *On the Origin of Species* (1859) raised doubts regarding the verity of Christian beliefs. Its impact reached Australian shores, as did that of other books which questioned religious master narratives. Both these influences—the rise of industry at the expense of traditional ways of life, and the increasing scepticism about the origins of humankind—caused many to question established

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109 However, when the Arts and Crafts Movement flourished in Australia it was without the Socialist base it had in Britain. Grace Cochrane, *The Crafts Movement in Australia: A History* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992), pp. 15–16.


111 The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern.

truths. This stimulated a search for alternative knowledge that combined elements of science with elements of spiritual enquiry.

The Theosophical Society was born from this process when Madame Blavatsky founded it in New York City, the United States of America (USA), in 1875. Leading Theosophists Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854–1934) outlined the connection between science and spirituality in their influential book *Thought Forms* (1901):

> As knowledge increases the attitude of science towards the things of the invisible world is undergoing considerable modification… it finds itself compelled to glance further afield, and to construct hypotheses as to the nature of the matter and forces which lie in the regions beyond the ken of its instruments.

Inspired by the intersection of science and spirituality, a number of artists, musicians and writers were engaged with Theosophy. Through their creative endeavours, they sought to explore and bring to life philosophies (what Theosophists referred to as ‘truths’) that, they believed, could only be seen in the material plane of existence by the spiritually enlightened.

Several scholars, including Sarmiala-Berger, McFarlane and Roe, have discussed the influence of the rise of nineteenth-century British occultism on Australia, from the 1850s to the 1930s. British migrants who had come to make their fortune in gold from the 1850s introduced these occult practices and ideas, and this context to Waller’s spiritual orientation is examined in Chapters Two and Three. This influence was first felt on the Victorian gold fields in the 1850s, and soon spread through the region (including Castlemaine and Bendigo, where Waller was raised), and other parts of Australia; however Melbourne remained a centre of activity. Interest in Spiritualism and alternative spirituality peaked at the time of Waller’s birth in the 1890s, with associated fairy-tale illustrations produced from the 1890s through to the

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113 Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*.
Alfred Deakin (1856–1919), who served as Prime Minister in 1903–4, was a prominent Australian Spiritualist. Given the strong British influence on Australian responses to the occult in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Owen’s scholarship is useful for this research.

The Celtic Revival was another seminal influence on Waller’s spiritual and artistic growth. The Revival occurred in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries principally in Ireland where there was a rejection of English rule and culture, and soon spread throughout the Celtic world. The arts were central mouthpieces of the Revival, including the applied, decorative and graphic arts, as well as interest in folklore, mysticism and the occult. Archaeological discoveries of ancient Celtic art and artefacts contributed to the embrace of Celtic pattern and ornament that occurred during the Revival, and was disseminated through the previously mentioned design sources including Owen Jones’ *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856). Art historian Nicola Gordon Bowe argued that the “visual expression” of the Celtic Revival can be seen in the Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland. This included the Dun Emer Press (1902–8, later Caula Press, 1908–46) and the stained-glass studio An Túr Gloine (Irish for ‘tower of glass’, 1903–44). Through books and stained-glass windows respectively, these workshops helped advance the Celtic Revival and this embrace of art forms associated with spiritual expression was something Waller undertook on a smaller scale in Australia.

The drive to communicate spiritual ideas through new modes of visual expression had a major impact on modern art. This took the form of striking and often unorthodox responses to both organised religion and to modern spiritual impulses. However, as Spretnak argued, Western art history has been rewritten since the 1920s to focus on Formalism in lieu of what she terms the “spiritual dynamic in modern

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This reflects a broader cultural embrace of the secular at the expense of the spiritual and the religious following the Second World War, and goes some way to explaining why artists like Waller have been marginalised in art history. Having established an understanding of the discourse of spiritual art, attention now turns to defining the four key spiritual systems that informed Waller’s art: Christianity, Theosophy, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the International Peace Mission Movement.

Waller’s Art, Alternative Spiritual Philosophies and Artistic Expression: An Introduction

Waller’s spiritually-directed, symbolic art is a part of the international discourse of modern art influenced by Christianity and alternative spiritual enquiry. In this section I introduce the key spiritual philosophies that Waller drew on to develop her personal set of symbols through which she communicated spiritual ideas in her art. The philosophies are: Christianity, mythology (namely Celtic and Classical), Theosophy and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. These spiritual philosophies have rich associations with artistic expression, and use both individual and collective symbols to represent key concepts regarding accessing and addressing the sacred.

In this section I introduce the argument that Waller’s sense of the spiritual was a personal combination of each of these spiritual philosophies, expressed through a language of symbols she developed in order to communicate her sense of the sacred. This departs from previous scholarship, which has framed her as a Theosophist. Instead, in the vast majority of scholarship on Waller emphasis has been placed on her engagement with alternative spiritual philosophies, despite the recurrence of Christian, mythological—principally related to Celtic mythology—imagery and modes of artistic expression throughout her œuvre.

126 Ibid., p. 5.
Before defining the spiritual philosophies that influenced Waller’s sense of the sacred, it is important to clarify that her spirituality was a personal fusion of these and other influences. Acting as an emissary, she used her art to encourage spiritual engagement, principally regarding spiritual enlightenment. She expressed her belief in the importance of spiritual emissaries in a revealing letter to her friend Ian Hanna in March 1940, when she was in the USA:

I am sure if each is guided by their highest intuition the world would be a wonderful place—it would be reborn—but as the highest is often very low—Spiritual leaders arise from time to time to show a higher understanding—though it is impossible for humanity to rise to this level—still if they have an example to emulate—they rise higher.127

Although written when she was particularly engaged with the philosophies of Father Divine, this statement offers insight into her view that spiritual leaders play an important role in encouraging spiritual awareness. The reference to ‘rising higher’ is significant, given that at this time she incorporated the motif of a figure moving towards the heavens in her stained glass.128 Further, her own use of the term ‘spiritual’ and references to ‘leaders’ demonstrates that she was engaged with spiritual enquiry and understood that there was more than one leader from whom she and others could seek guidance.

The seminal Christian foundation of Waller’s practice has been largely ignored in previous studies on the artist. An exception is Miley’s insightful essay in the previously-mentioned catalogue for *The Art of Christian Waller* exhibition, in which both orthodox and alternative spiritual philosophies are mentioned. She drew attention to her personal use of Christian imagery and provided some insight into the spiritual symbolism in her stained glass and influences on her work in the medium. Miley focused on the technical qualities of the windows and provided her view as to the symbolic meaning of the works.

Although Waller’s birth certificate does not list a religion, it is almost certain that she was raised in the Methodist Church, a denomination the Yandell family were affiliated with.129 Founded in England in an effort to reform and renew the Church

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127 Waller to Hanna, March 1940, Papers of Ian Hanna, MS 12896.
128 Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” p.46.
of England, Methodism was considered the people’s religion that flourished from the eighteenth century. The first known meeting took place in the district of Windsor in the colony of New South Wales in 1811. Methodism soon spread through the Australian colonies, with the first service in Melbourne taking place in 1836. Historian Glen O’Brien has observed that, in the period 1850–60, Wesleyan (Methodist) services attracted the greatest number of parishioners than any other denomination in Victoria and South Australia. This fact assists in understanding the place of Methodism in Victorian history, particularly regarding the spiritual experiences of the generation preceding Waller’s.

As I outline in the following chapter, evidence indicates that the Yandell family were committed Christians. This reflects the prominent role religion yielded on Australians in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. McFarlane has asserted that Waller’s childhood was “run through with Theosophical influences”, whereas I argue that she was exposed to a range of spiritual influences in her youth, including Christianity, Freemasonry, Spiritualism and mythology. There is no evidence that indicates Waller was more influenced by Theosophy than any other spiritual philosophy or system of faith with which she engaged during her youth.

Waller’s Christian upbringing exposed her to the symbolic potential of religious art. As outlined in the previous sections, art and faith are deeply intertwined in all major world religions, and this union is profoundly expressed in Christianity. Art historian Herbert Read’s influential book Art and Society (1937), published during Waller’s period of activity, provides a detailed account of the relationship between art and spirituality:

…caught up in a process of logical thought, the work of art becomes an intermediary between the world of natural phenomena and the world of spiritual presences. It becomes either a symbol to express a mental or

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130 Methodism in the United Kingdom spread through the teaching of John Wesley (1703–1791), Charles Wesley (1707–1788) and George Whitefield (1714–1770); Whitefield played a key role in the promulgation of the faith in the Americas. Methodism spread throughout the British Empire.


emotional state, or a representation or imitation of a natural object. In either case, it is a vehicle which conveys information, a means of communication. Read went on to argue that the key merit of religious art is its capacity to depict the invisible orders of existence. While he noted that this can lead to attempts to control religious art, in Waller’s case she had a great deal of creative freedom, even when producing ecclesiastical stained-glass windows, as discussed in Chapters Five and Seven.

While there is a rich tradition of religious art in Australia, it has not been a popular theme within art history. This reflects a broader trend in modern and contemporary Western art history that has sought to distinguish between religion and art. In Australia the discipline has favoured three types of modern art: that concerned with nationalism and landscape painting, art which was labelled ‘modern’, and art influenced by French painting. The influence of British modernism is another growing strand of enquiry. Waller’s artistic quest art does not fit within any of these narratives. Another expanding area of scholarship that comes close to encompassing Waller is in the field of decorative arts. Publications such as Andrew Montana’s *The Art Movement in Australia* (2000) and Menz’s *Morris & Company* (1994) and other publications provide important context to Waller’s engagement with decorative expression.

During the prime of her career—the inter-war period—academic landscape painting dominated in galleries and art journals. The most prominent exhibition of religious

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134 Ibid.
135 In her foreword to *Images of Religion in Australian Art*, art historian Margaret M. Manion wrote that religion has influenced “a surprisingly large number of gifted Australian artists”, indicating that many of these artists were not widely considered to have pursued religious concepts through their work. Margaret M. Manion, “Foreword,” in *Images of Religion in Australian Art*, ed. Rosemary Crumlin (Kensington, NSW: Bay Books, 1988), p. 9.
art in Australia, the annual Blake Prize for Religious Art was first awarded, at the very end of her career, and she did not have any involvement with it. Indeed, modernism driven by nationalism has dominated standard histories of Australian art, which according to art historians Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara and Philip Goad, have narrated “a similar story with the same events and figures repeated in each publication”. Often, religious and spiritual art has little place in these histories.

Mythological influences on Waller’s art also represent an under-examined dimension of her work that I address in this thesis. I argue that Waller’s interest in mythology facilitated her engagement with alternative spiritual practices. A close look at the *OED* definition of the word ‘myth’ makes clear that it is closely connected with supernatural, religious and spiritual concepts:

> A traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon.

Mythology is connected with place, cultural identity and history. While not factual, it is generally not considered ‘false’, and possesses a cultural value that transcends its historical origins. History and myth are intertwined and have a long tradition of informing art and art history. Furthermore, as Classicists Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone have observed, despite not being religious texts in the manner of the Bible or Christian scriptures, mythology has close ties to religious practices and has resulted in the transferral of concepts and ideas between systems of faith and spiritual practices. Waller, I argue, followed this practice by drawing on Classical, medieval and Celtic myths and combining these with her Christian and alternative spiritual values to create artworks that expressed her sense of the sacred.

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141 The Prize was established, in part, to strengthen the dialogue between artists and the Church. Since its inception it has been beset by controversy and provoking questions about the relevance of religion to an increasingly-secular society, and the role of the Prize has come into question in recent years, reflecting broader secularism in Australian society that informs attitudes to art.


Waller’s engagement with mythology was informed by currents in Australian and European art that she was exposed to during her formative years. Art historian Deborah Edwards has examined the influence of Classical mythology in Australian art from the 1890s to the 1930s, which was informed by a Classical Revival in Europe.147 Australian Artists Bertram MacKennal (1863–1931) and Rupert Bunny (1864–1947), amongst others, produced art that engaged with Classical mythology.148 Some of these artists—including Sydney Long (1871–1955)—were particularly attracted to pagan beings—such as fauns and nymphs—and often incorporated these into their art. Long’s painting Pan (1898) [Figure 6] is exemplary of this tradition. This period covers the time when Waller was raised and when she developed into a mature artist.

![Figure 6: Sydney Long, Pan, 1898, oil on canvas, 107.5 x 178.8 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney](image)

While medieval and Celtic mythology had a more pronounced influence on Waller’s artistic development, references to Classical mythology are apparent in her art. This is seen in her earliest known painting A Petition and A Lady of Thermopylae (both 1909), and in some of her illustrations such as the cover of Birth: A Little Journal of Australian Poetry (1921). By the time she created The Great Breath, she had developed a powerful approach to art that saw her synthesise mythological, spiritual and other influences, as seen in the design The Golden Faun which clearly references the Greek God Pan yet also incorporates astrology and other spiritual practices. Each of these artworks are discussed in the following chapters.

Literature was a key art form through which she engaged with mythology and spiritual philosophies. While she would have been exposed to reproductions and original artworks during her student years, it is literary sources that she repeatedly

147 Christian Waller was not included in Edwards’ study. 
148 Ibid.
turned to when selecting narratives for her works. Her distinctive responses to literary subjects, such as her illustrations for a 1924 adaptation of Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, demonstrate her own close reading of the texts. This argument is supported by her extensive collection of fiction and non-fiction books concerning mythology and spirituality. The originality of her work and evidence I have drawn together regarding the literature she read indicates that she created artworks in response to literature that, in turn, engaged with myths and legends.

As Waller developed into a mature artist Theosophy provided her with a platform for expanding her spiritual knowledge. Before progressing it is important to clarify that my use of the term Theosophy is deliberately capitalised throughout this thesis as I am referring to it within the context of the Theosophical Society, as opposed to the noun ‘theosophy’, which is defined by the *OED* as: “any system of speculation which bases the knowledge of nature upon that of the divine nature”. Although no concrete evidence survives, as discussed, it is likely that Waller was exposed to this well-known spiritual philosophy during her childhood and particularly while a student at the National Gallery Art School in Melbourne. This is because of its popularity amongst creative circles—attracting the interest of Waller’s drawing teacher Frederick McCubbin—at that time.

The Theosophical Society was a prominent spiritual philosophy during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; though it remained a minority movement in Australia when compared to organised religions. It was popularised through the establishment of a series of lodges in cities throughout the world, including Melbourne. Its influence spread across the Western world, peaking between the 1890s and the 1920s, and there was a significant following in Australia.

The Society encouraged the comparative religious study of the “ancient wisdom” found in Eastern and Western religious traditions, including paganism and the

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149 Observed by the author during multiple visits to the Waller House between 2011 and 2016.
occult. It also offered a bridge between science and religion in an age rocked by Darwinism. Since 1896, the objectives of the Society have been:

- To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour.
- To encourage the comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science.
- To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity.

Collectively, these aims indicate that the Society was concerned with equality, spiritual education, and the exploration of the unknown and that lies outside the material world. The idealism latent in each of these objectives most likely appealed to Waller, yet her practice did not align itself to a specific Theosophical cause, as my analysis of her artworks and personal ephemera makes clear.

The Society’s acceptance of other faiths likely also appealed to Waller and enabled her access to the Melbourne Lodge’s library despite not necessarily identifying as a Theosophist. The Society did not require members and disciples to abandon their ties to organised religions, and a number of members retained their Christian faith whilst also exploring Theosophical teachings. The motto of the Society, “There is no religion higher than truth”, reinforces the fact that Theosophists considered their pantheistic teachings superior to those of worldly religions. By and large, it attracted those who were disillusioned with orthodox religion, and, like Waller, sought greater spiritual engagement.

Figure 7: Ex Libris / Christian Waller, 1927, linocut printed in black in from two blocks, in her copy of Blavatsky’s Isis Unveiled, Waller House

154 Ibid., p. xii.
155 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
156 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
157 Ibid., p. 20.
159 Roe, Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879–1939, p. 29.
Information and spiritual guidance was disseminated by the Theosophical Society through lectures, publications (including journals and books) and through activities organised by lodges. Blavatsky’s magnum opus *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (1877) was a central source for the Society’s principles that traced the scientific and spiritual history of humankind, presenting an alternative reading to that advanced by mainstream scientists and theologians.  

Waller owned a copy of *Isis Unveiled* and placed her bookplate on the front endpapers [Figure 7], suggesting its special importance to her. Equally, she possessed a wide range of spiritual, literary and artistic texts which she also marked her ownership of by affixing a bookplate to the inner covers. The existence of these books and the way she personalised them indicate the broad spiritual influences she harnessed when making art.

The philosophy advanced by the Theosophical Society concerning the spiritual—and physical—evolution of humankind was an important influence on Waller’s art and life from the late 1920s through to the mid-1930s.  

This was most overtly expressed in *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs* (1932), which includes seven striking linocuts that sequentially depict one of the seven phases of human evolution that Blavatsky outlined in her other seminal work *The Secret Doctrine, the Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy* (1888). Although some of the Society’s aims and values are explicitly expressed in *The Great Breath* and some other artworks Waller made during this time, there is no concrete evidence that she identified as a Theosophist. I argue that by not being a member of the Society, she was able to harness Theosophical concepts and as well as those advanced by other spiritual philosophies—including Christianity, mythology, Celtic mysticism, the Golden Dawn and the International Peace Mission Movement—to cultivate a personal spiritual philosophy that she communicated through her art. McFarlane has asserted that Waller regularly attended lectures and was a member of the library of the Melbourne Lodge of the Theosophical Society. At the time it was the largest occult library in the Southern Hemisphere. It was a lending library with a detailed catalogue, and it was not necessary for readers to be members of the Theosophical Society to use its

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160 Ibid., p. 5.  
161 Observed by author during a visit to Waller House, 16 July 2011.  
services. Indeed, Waller owned a number of Theosophical and occult books, further signalling her strong interest in the spiritual education the Society offered.

Waller was part of a group of Australian artists whose work was informed to varying degrees by Theosophy, particularly in the early-twentieth century. Clarice Beckett (1887–1935) and Florence Fuller (1867–1946) rank among Australian followers. For a number of modern artists in Australia and overseas the Society facilitated the break from orthodox Christian imagery. This spiritual philosophy, as McFarlane has shown, privileged the invisible over the visible and this facilitated the development of an alternative visual reality. Women artists were particularly drawn to the Society, as it provided them with educational and social opportunities and had strong ties to the suffragette movement. There is no evidence linking these artists to Waller, casting further doubt over the degree to which she engaged with Theosophy and the Theosophical Society over other modes of spiritual enquiry.

Something Australian artists inspired by Theosophy shared with their international colleagues was the perceived duty to communicate their spiritual insight through their art, a common objective of spiritually-directed artists. With regards to Theosophy, their efforts were particularly directed to the uninitiated. This

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166 Titles in Waller’s library include Blavatsky’s Isis Unveiled. A number of these occult books feature Waller’s bookplate or her name printed on the inner cover, signalling her ownership of the book.
167 Observed by the author during visits to the Waller House, Ivanhoe, Victoria between May 2011 and July 2013.
169 Ibid., pp. 14, 67.
170 Ibid., pp. 1–7.
171 Ibid., p. 10.
connected with Blavatsky’s view that the duty of Theosophists was to “encourage and assist individual fellows in self-improvement, intellectual, moral and spiritual...”  

172 This spiritual insight arose from their ability to see the unseen, and to access and communicate with higher levels of reality. For this reason abstraction was often embraced as a method of expressing the spiritual through form.  

173 This was seen in the work of the New Zealand-cum-Australian painter Godfrey Miller (1893–1964) and, further afield, in the work of Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and Swede Hilma af Klint (1862–1944); including her mesmerising painting *Group X, No. 1. Altarpiece* (1915) [Figure 8]. However, Waller’s art remained figurative and narrative-driven.

Another important spiritual influence on Waller’s art was the highly secretive Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (henceforth Golden Dawn). Waller’s engagement with the Golden Dawn occurred from the mid-1920s through to the late-1930s. Sarmiala-Berger has argued that Waller likely became acquainted with the Movement during her travels to England and Ireland in 1930–33; however, due to the occult nature of the group, this cannot be confirmed.  

174 The Golden Dawn was, after Theosophy, the most prominent occult philosophy in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century England.  

175 Founded by Samuel MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918) in London in 1888, notable members included former Theosophist William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), whose poetry was a significant influence on Waller.  

176 Like Theosophy, the Golden Dawn was focused on the spiritual education of initiates, something Waller strived to facilitate through her art practice. It emerged from Rosicrucianism and ancient Hermetic traditions associated with Hermes Trismegistus, and encompassed Egyptian magic, Astrology, Numerology and the Tarot.  

The Golden Dawn represented the first of three orders through which members chronologically progressed as they mastered certain teachings and magical

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175 Owen, The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern, pp. 50–56.


practices. The search for light within was a central aim, and this light was harnessed to progress the good work of the Gods.\textsuperscript{178} The aim of the spiritual practices was, as scholar Mary K. Greer has argued, to unite one’s Will with the Self. This process allowed an adept to access their inner-God.\textsuperscript{179} To achieve this, the Golden Dawn promoted the study and practice of ritual magic as a means of spiritual growth, and embraced divination tools including Numerology, Astrology and the Tarot, as well as the symbols of the Cabbala and Ancient Egyptian magic and mythology.\textsuperscript{180} Waller experimented with each of these spiritual practices, particularly during the decade following her overseas trip in 1929–30, indicating that she likely engaged with the spiritual philosophy of the Golden Dawn.

Waller and expatriate Australian stained-glass artist and occult figure John Brahms ‘J. B.’ Trinick (1890–1974) shared an interest in the Golden Dawn. Like Waller, Trinick was deeply fascinated by the occult, and he was a member of the Golden Dawn.\textsuperscript{181} Trinick, moreover, felt a pull to England as a spiritual homeland, given its associations with alternative spirituality.\textsuperscript{182} His interests were obviously serious, as, in 1920, prominent occultist Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942) commissioned him to design a book of the great symbols of the tarot.\textsuperscript{183} Trinick exhibited Major Arcana Tarot designs in 1915 in the \textit{Victorian Artists’ Society 20th Annual Exhibition}, in which Waller exhibited a work with a mystical title, including \textit{Oh, Thou Great Spirit, Hear Me.}\textsuperscript{184} Waite, a key contributor to the Celtic Revival, was another central influence on Waller’s art, was a conduit for Australians who were interested in spiritual ideas propounded by the Order. Trinick’s influence on Waller’s spiritually-orientated art is examined in Chapters Three and Six.

The impact of the Golden Dawn on Waller’s art is difficult to determine due to the clandestine nature of the organisation and the dearth of her extant correspondence and personal papers; yet the presence of symbolism associated with the Golden

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{180} Owen, \textit{The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern}, pp. 46–47, 53–55.
\textsuperscript{182} Fiona Elizabeth Moore, “Revealing the Light: Stained Glass and the Art of John Trinick” (MA, University of Melbourne, 2008), pp. 53–54.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., p. 134.
\textsuperscript{184} This was number 351 in the catalogue, where it was titled Design toward a New Major Arcana of The Tarot. Another work, item 353 Page Design for a Work on Alchemy, also indicates that Trinick’s interest in mysticism was strong at the time when he befriended Waller. No price is given to either work, suggesting that they were not for sale.

Dawn and its magical practices in her art signals its significance to her spiritual outlook. Some of the symbols Waller favoured—particularly in the early 1930s—indicate an awareness of the Order’s magical practices. Specifically, in her Journal and Book of Stories (c. 1931–44), she included detailed notes on Numerology and made reference to Astrology, incorporating these systems of divination promoted by the organisation in works such as The Great Breath.  

Waller’s drive to communicate spiritual values through her art also led her to become a follower of African-American spiritual leader Father Divine’s (c. 1876–1965) International Peace Mission Movement. He drew together a range of influences, including Christianity and New Thought to develop a spiritual philosophy in which he presented himself as God and claimed he could bring both eternal life and financial success to his worshippers. In 1939 Waller travelled to the United States of America where she joined a haven in Harlem, New York, and became one of Father Divine’s Angels (also referred to as his ‘sisters’). These were Divine’s disciples, who took vows of chastity, cut ties with their friends and families, and devoted themselves to his service. At this time, the influence of Theosophy on her practice diminished, reflecting a broader cultural decline in followers. As with Theosophy and the Golden Dawn, the Movement promoted spiritual enquiry and specific practices in order to unify humankind to achieve individual enlightenment. Evidence I have uncovered through interviews reveals that Waller was engaged with the Movement before and after her trip to America in 1939–40. Her friend Rupert Beswicke (1892–1980), was also a follower of the movement. According to his nephew, Ken Bethell, Beswicke was an active member of the Melbourne branch, and also travelled to America to become a

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185 Waller, “Journal and Book of Stories.”
190 Beswicke was the son of prominent Melbourne architect John Beswicke (1847–1925).

disciple of Father Divine. Although no extant personal correspondence dates Waller’s meeting with Beswicke, she painted a portrait of him on wood as Sir Lancelot [Figure 9], which she signed with her maiden name. It has similarities with the painted furniture in the Waller House and therefore probably dates from the early–mid 1920s. Beswicke clearly knew Waller for at least a decade before the Peace Mission Movement developed a strong following in Melbourne, and may have introduced Waller to this Movement, or vice-versa.

Father Divine gave a publicised lecture to followers in Australia in 1938 that Waller may have attended. An early mention of his religious order was made in a published letter from 1934 by J. A. Pawsey to the editor of the Camperdown Chronicle, in which Pawsey noted that the Movement was developing an international following that included Australians and, more specifically, Melburnians. The following year the Argus published an article from “Our Own Correspondent”, which outlined the Peace Mission Movement and provided a biographical sketch of Father Divine. “To Divine’s disciples he is ‘God’”, the reporter wrote, adding that he is treated as the personification of the Deity. This imparts an extraordinary vividness to the “worship” of the cult, and intensifies its strangeness to the outside world. It also detailed the controversy surrounding the Movement, which included assault charges and corruption allegations against Father Divine. The article explained that followers, known as Angels, assumed a new identity and had forgotten their birth name, when they entered Divine’s Kingdom.

In April 1937 a Mrs. D. L. T. Cox of the Melbourne suburb of Mentone, noted that there were “about 500 followers of Father Divine” in the state of Victoria. In August of the following year, the first official residential extension in Australia opened in that suburb. The residence on Beach Road was designated for the followers of the Movement in Victoria:

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191 Bethell. “Ken Bethell Interviewed by Grace Blakeley-Carroll.”
192 A portrait sketch of Beswicke also survives in the same collection as the painting.
193 The portrait is held in a private collection in Victoria.
It is being conducted on the same lines as many similar “kingdoms” in various parts of America. Last night the occasion was marked by a banquet at the Glenworth Hall, Mentone, which was attended by about 100 followers. Waller may have been one of these, and her interest in Father Divine’s teaching could date from c. 1937. As discussed in Chapter Six, it was an *annus horribilis*, for Waller due to the revelation of her husband’s extra-marital affair, and perhaps impelled her to search for new spiritual meaning through the International Peace Mission Movement.

The influence of Father Divine’s teaching on Waller’s art has not been well documented. In her Master’s thesis McFarlane included a black and white photograph showing Waller’s painted mural *The Sower* in the background. I have located a copy of the 28 April 1956 edition of *The New Day*, in which an illustration of Waller’s *The Sower* is depicted [Figure 10]. This was the main journal of the International Peace Mission Movement. I have also identified preliminary sketches in a private collection in Victoria that provide evidence Waller was the artist behind the work.

![Figure 10: The Sower Illustration After Painted Mural, c. 1939–40, reproduced in: The New Day, 28 April](image)

Father Divine’s ongoing impact on Waller’s art and life has been proven through new material, which has come to light during this research. I have identified references to Father Divine in Waller’s *Journal and Book of Stories*, which is transcribed

199 *The Spoken Word* was another prominent journal associated with the International Peace Mission Movement.

and analysed in detail in Chapter Seven. The entry aligns Divine with God, something that is further emphasised through Waller’s symbolic design for *The Sower*. While these and the other alternative spiritual philosophies outlined above influence Waller’s spiritual thinking, rather than aligning herself to one spiritual or religious system at any given time, I argue that Waller harnessed spiritual values from each philosophy, expressing her personal sense of the sacred through key symbols with the view of facilitating the spiritual growth of viewers. Attention now turns to introducing and defining the key methodologies I utilise to analyse the role of symbols in Waller’s art practice.

**Waller’s Language of Symbols: Iconography, Iconology, Semiotics and Connoisseurship**

Drawing inspiration from Christianity, the alternative spiritual systems outlined above and other philosophies of belief and divination, Waller developed a personal set of symbols to communicate her sense of the sacred. McFarlane and Sarmiala-Berger have argued that Waller used symbolism in her hand-printed book *The Great Breath* and other works to trigger spiritual contemplation and Miley has identified her personal use of some symbols in stained glass. In this thesis I extend this argument by analysing the symbolism in her whole artistic output. Iconography, Iconology and Semiotics, as well as the previously mentioned concepts regarding spiritual art are used for analysing the meaning and function of these symbols. I then briefly discuss how principles of Connoisseurship assist in discerning Waller’s symbols and, by extension, have enabled me to identify instances of collaboration with Napier Waller.

In order to understand the symbolic function of Christian Waller’s artworks, it is important to establish a methodological and theoretical platform to analyse them. It was during her period of activity when historical methodologies concerning the meaning of works of art flourished as important tools for the art historian. These included practices of Iconography, Iconology and Semiotics, which are concerned with the meaning of works of art. As I argue that Waller consciously used symbols

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200 Waller, “Journal and Book of Stories.”
and symbolic narratives to encourage spiritual contemplation in her work, these theories have direct relevance to this study.

Iconography, a central branch of art historical analysis, provides useful tools to investigate Waller’s spiritually-directed art. Iconography is concerned with the subject matter of art—as opposed to Formalism, which is concerned with the formal properties of the work. Motifs, symbols, allegories and narratives are investigated and decoded in an Iconographic approach, which situates the work within the cultural and artistic traditions in which it was created. Theories of Iconography were first advanced by art historians in the early-twentieth century, including Émile Mâle (1862–1954), whose work focused on French religious art from the twelfth through to the eighteenth centuries which he considered to be “eminently symbolical”.

Building on theories of Iconography, influential German-American art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) developed a tripartite system of analysis to understand works of art. In his classic book *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (1953) Panofsky outlined some of the factors that should be taken into account when analysing art through an Iconological lens. He reasoned that symbolic interpretation must take into consideration the artist’s personal circumstances and values when interpreting the meaning of the work. This aligns with my argument that Waller’s artworks must be considered with the broader context of her *œuvre* and personal spiritual inclinations.

Originating in linguistics, Semiotics is a method of art-historical analysis that connects directly with Iconography and Iconology and is relevant to this research. It is concerned with that analysis of signs and culture—which, according to Semioticians, are types of signs. Theories with particular relevance to this study are those advanced by Umberto Eco, and by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson. Eco’s approach to Semiotics focuses on signs as forms of communication. He defined a
sign as “everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else…”\textsuperscript{206} Pertinent to this research is the implication that signs can be used to communicate non-visible spiritual concepts, as Waller does in her practice; Bal and Bryson also argue that the theory of Semiotics in an art-historical context is essentially “antirealist”\textsuperscript{207}. Indeed, this is especially pertinent to visual studies, in which as theorist W. J. T. Mitchell has argued, a “Pictorial Turn” has occurred, necessitating an understanding of the relationship between symbols in art, language and texts.\textsuperscript{208}

Art historian Meyer Schapiro also explored the way in which artists interpret historical texts, and argued that there is a tendency for representations to reflect contemporary and personal attitudes, and that often the visual representation supersedes the influence of the original written source.\textsuperscript{209} Viewed in this way, it becomes clear how a Semiotic approach facilitates my investigation into the role of symbols in Waller’s practice. It can help establish her motivations behind the symbols and narratives she engaged with and, by extension, sheds light on her personal sense of the spiritual.

One of the central issues Bal and Bryson explored in their essay is that of context. They argued that context is an important dimension in the Semiotic analysis of art. For the authors, contexts—including the context around the work when it was created, the context it has been placed within by art historians, and that of the art historian in the present who is analysing the work—creates its own set of signs that require interpretation.\textsuperscript{210} They cautioned the art historian to recognise that they are implicit in making meaning out of the signs and contexts they analyse. Furthermore, signs do not have fixed meaning, as Bal and Bryson explained:

They enter into a plurality of contexts; works of art are constituted by different viewers in different ways at different times and places…Once launched into the world, the work of art is subject to all the vicissitudes of

\textsuperscript{206} For Eco, the communication process involves the transmission of a signal (which isn’t always a sign) from a source to a destination, passing through a transmitter and along a channel. 
Eco, A Theory of Semiotics, pp. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{207} Bal and Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” p. 174.
\textsuperscript{210} Other concepts examined include senders, receivers, icon, index and symbol. 
reception; as a work involving the sign, it encounters from the beginning the ineradicable fact of semiotic play.\textsuperscript{211}

They draw principally on relevant aspects of Charles Sanders Pierce’s (1839–1914) complex model of analysis, namely some of his typologies of signs: \textit{icon}, \textit{index} and \textit{symbol}.\textsuperscript{212}

![Figure 11: Hope Window (Design for a Stained-Glass Window), c. 1931, watercolour on card, 46.3 x 23.3 cm, Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat, purchased 1979](image)

Pierce’s concept of the \textit{symbol} is particularly relevant to this study. He argued that a \textit{symbol} is dependent upon prior knowledge of the \textit{representaman} (the form of the sign) and \textit{interpretant} and the \textit{object} for its meaning to be apprehended by the viewer. For example, in \textit{Hope Window (Design for a Stained-Glass Window)} (c. 1931) [Figure 11], a state of spiritual enlightenment is depicted. The \textit{representaman} in the image is the androgynous figure standing with their hands open by their side, with spiritual energy flowing from their hands to the earth while doves gather in the background; the object is the design itself, which was intended to be translated into an ecclesiastical stained-glass window. The \textit{interpretant} is the concept of spiritual hope, which will be understood depending on the viewer’s familiarity with the spiritual philosophies Waller drew on. However, as it was made in the Judeo-Christian society of Australia, viewers are likely to comprehend that a larger-than-life figure wearing pale robes with flaming hair, a six-pointed star on their chest, a vibrant rainbow and a flock of doves in the background alongside the word “HOPE” written in capital letters, is associated with spirituality. As such, though Waller’s symbols reflect her personal

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., p. 179.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., pp. 188–89.
spiritual inclinations, the way she used them facilitates viewers’ contemplation of the sacred.

Principles of Connoisseurship have guided my analysis of Waller’s art and have facilitated the reattribution of works she created in collaboration with her husband. Use of the methodology dates back to Renaissance art historian Giorgio Vasari (1511–74) and is also associated with the theories and scholarship of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68) and Giovanni Morelli (1816–91).213 By Connoisseurship I refer to the contemporary meaning of the term, as defined by art historian Donald Preziosi “an ability to discern original or authentic works (or collections of works) from copies or forgeries…”214 Put simply, connoisseurs look for signs in an artwork that reveal clues to its authorship, history and, in some cases, authenticity. While I have drawn on some methods of Connoisseurship, my study has remained focussed on the symbolism in Waller’s art.

American art historian Bernard Berenson’s (1865–1959) principles of Connoisseurship are particularly useful for this study. The Renaissance and Old Master specialist was originally concerned with analysing the form of artworks to identify relationships between them, and later applied these skills to identify authorship.215 Berenson outlined his principles of Connoisseurship in his essay “Rudiments of connoisseurship (A Fragment)” (1894). He identified three key materials for the study of historical art:

1. Contemporary documents
2. Tradition
3. The works of art themselves216

Through close visual analysis of the artworks in consultation with contemporary documents and through a sound understanding of tradition, he argued, a connoisseur is able to identify minute markers of the artist’s hand, in terms of the execution of the work and its narrative.217 In this study, I have also assessed the three types of

214 “Glossary,” p. 574.
Berenson’s approach to Connoisseurship also concerned extending knowledge of artistic intentions. In an extract from *Aesthetics, Ethics and History in the Arts of Visual Representation* (1948) Berenson stressed the importance of the artist’s extant œuvre in revealing their artistic vision, and observed that “extant works make up the artistic personality, as distinct from the civic biographical personality; and this alone is of vital interest”. He went on to argue “Artistic personalities are equivalent to distinct modes of seeing…” 218 While I argue that knowledge of the artist’s biography is vital to a rigorous study of the work, I also consider Berenson’s focus on the formal qualities of art as integral elements to identifying authorship and relationships with other works. In the context of this study, principles of Connoisseurship have enabled me to ascertain Christian Waller’s contributions to works that have until now been solely attribute to her husband and vice versa. This approach has also enhanced my understanding of the relationship between Waller’s works across media.

The methodologies introduced and outlined above have guided my investigation of the spiritual impulses in Waller’s art. As I have already clarified, my thesis is not a strict adoption of these theories but, rather, they are used to inform my analysis of Waller’s symbolic, narrative-driven œuvre. These are complemented by other art historical methodologies, as outlined in the Introduction.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have demonstrated how Waller’s art fits within the discourse of spiritual art. Through analysis of extant scholarship on her I have identified gaps in and limitations of the literature. The literature review of art that addresses the spiritual and the sacred has provided a platform for analysing Waller’s art within this discourse. The concept of ‘spiritual’ in the context of this research has been introduced and defined. I have outlined the key alternative spiritual philosophies that Waller combined with her fundamental Christian sensibilities: the Theosophical

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Society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the International Peace Mission Movement. This has been complemented by the introduction and definition of methodologies of Iconography, Iconology, Semiotics and Connoisseurship which I draw on to analyse the symbolism within Waller’s practice. In the next chapter I embark upon an analysis of Waller’s juvenile art, family background and art training in order to determine how these informed the direction of her practice.
Chapter Two

Sketching the Early Years: The Formative Influences on Waller’s Art and Life

Figure 12: Bartlett Brothers,Untitled (Christian Yandell), c. 1909, gelatin silver photograph mounted on board, private collection, Victoria
From her youth, Waller drew on symbols and myths to create narrative-driven artworks produced in a manner that aligned with Arts and Crafts values. My analysis of her earliest surviving artworks shows she used art as a vehicle for spiritual expression and was aware of the didactic potential of art. This chapter provides the context for her development as an artist between 1906 and 1922. Other authors have glanced over this period and argued that her husband was the major influence on her art during this time, claiming that he introduced her to mythical and medieval art and literature when they met in 1913. The first aim, therefore, is to highlight Waller’s engagement with these interests prior to and contemporaneously with her meeting Napier Waller.

Drawing on new material I have discovered—including the Bendigo Sketchbook (c. 1909)—the second aim is to demonstrate that Christian Waller’s engagement with spiritual and mystical themes, the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival (which I link to her Cornish family background), took place earlier than other scholars have suggested, and played a key role in the development of her art and spirituality. The third aim of this chapter is to discuss how the art tuition she received informed her subsequent development, especially the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement. This includes her time studying visual art at the Castlemaine School of Mines under Art Master Carl Steiner (1905–8), with former Bendigo School of Mines and Industries Art Master Hugh Fegan (1908–10), and at the National Gallery Art School (1910–14) in Melbourne where she studied drawing under McCubbin and painting under Hall, Director of the Gallery and School. The tuition offered at these institutions was modelled on technical education in Victorian Britain, namely the so-called South Kensington system. This system, its teaching and its artistic and philosophical emphases in relation to Arts and Crafts values were powerful influences on Waller.

A fourth and final aim is to analyse the central place of sketching in Waller’s art practice. In her sketchbooks the artistic, literary and spiritual influences that drove her activity are clearly visible. They comprise an important dimension of her creative output that has not been the subject of detailed analysis in previous studies.  

219 David Thomas has made a passing reference to the sketchbook Waller kept during her overseas trip—referring to it as her London Sketchbook—in 1929–30.
Analysis of the *Bendigo Sketchbook* reveals an early concern with understanding traditional artistic process as well as a studious fascination with symbolism, allegory and ancient history.

**Art Education in Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Victoria**

Before considering the way in which Waller’s juvenile art laid the foundation for her mature work, it is necessary to consider the history and philosophy of the South Kensington system of art tuition. It was established in mid-nineteenth century Britain and influenced by the British Arts and Crafts Movement. This system had a major impact on the curricula Waller was taught as an Australian art student in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Understanding it facilitates analysis of Waller’s experience as a student passing through these systems, and how her tuition influenced her practice.

The British institutes were, in turn, modelled on European art and technical schools, which operated towards the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. The high standards of French design—it was understood—stemmed from the state-supported art-education system. In 1837 in London, the Government School of Design (later Normal School of Design then the Royal College of Art), was set up to generate graduates with skills to produce manufactured goods of the highest standards. In 1852 Henry Cole (1808–82) was appointed superintendent of the government schools of design, and was based in the so-called ‘Head School’ of design at Somerset House in London. In 1857 this school and the associated museum, the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) was relocated to the London district of South Kensington, hence the South Kensington system.

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221 Ibid.
The South Kensington system referred to the National Course of Instruction that Cole established. It was devised by the School’s Art Superintendent Richard Redgrave and comprised twenty-three stages; Stage One was Linear drawing by aid of instruments and stage Twenty Three was Technical studies. The necessity for an enhanced training model was made clear at the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, held in the Crystal Palace at Hyde Park, London 1851, in which the standard of European design was visibly superior to that of Great Britain. The development of proficient drawing skills and the comprehension of ‘design’ as a visual language was at the core of the syllabus. The importance of accuracy was stressed at all stages, leading to criticism of the rigidity of the system. Nonetheless, its model served as the foundation of art curriculum in England and parts of the Commonwealth—including Australia—until the inter-war period. This understanding of the expressive potential of design and ornament, as well as the high standings of artistry created a legacy that informed Waller’s tuition on the other side of the world more than fifty years later.

Local access to formal art tuition was made available through the growing number of technical schools that were established in Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century. These institutions emerged in response to the Victorian gold rush (c. 1851–69), when it was thought prudent to educate the mass of primarily British migrants and their descendants who flocked to regional Victorian towns in search of gold. (This included Waller’s paternal ancestors, whose background is discussed later in this chapter.) At the time, it was speculated that the rise of the mining and manufacturing industries associated with the Gold Rush would impinge on standards of craftwork and design. There was a fear that taste and culture would be compromised by commercial interests, fuelled by the machinery associated with the mining industry.

224 Frayling, The Royal College of Art: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Art and Design, p. 41.
227 Frayling, The Royal College of Art: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Art and Design, p. 41.
These attitudes underscored the philosophy of the art schools established in goldmining towns in Victoria in the nineteenth century, including Castlemaine and Bendigo, where Waller first studied art. For similar reasons, the town of Ballarat founded a public gallery in 1884.\textsuperscript{230} Upon its inception, the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery (now Ballarat Art Gallery) was designed to have an art school operating within its walls, though this did not eventuate.\textsuperscript{231} Nonetheless, the attitude of those behind the institution offers insight into the beliefs that informed the establishment of art schools and galleries in regional Victoria, where Waller was raised.

The philosophy that underpinned the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery is evident in publications from the time. In 1887, the Secretary of Ballarat Fine Arts and Public Gallery, James Powell, published \textit{A Plea for Art Culture}. In the essay, Powell made direct links between art training facilities and industrial—and, by extension, economic—success:

\begin{quote}
the history of modern civilization teaches us that, apart from the elevating and refining influences of such institutions [public galleries and schools of art], the economic value of art culture as an aid to the industrial progress of nations is incalculable.\textsuperscript{232}
\end{quote}

Here Powell articulated the philosophy that social, moral and economic prosperity could be attained through training art practitioners to the highest standard. That such training might occur within a public gallery—where students had ready examples of original artworks and copies of masterpieces—would, Powell argued, enhance the benefits to the student and, by extension, society more broadly. This philosophy derives from the effects of the eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution in Britain, from which the South Kensington model emerged; it became a major influence on art education in colonial and early-twentieth-century Victoria.

Welsh architect and designer Owen Jones (1809–74) played a central role in advocating the system’s language of design. He was a close associate of Cole who helped devise the design curriculum at the South Kensington School and had a

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
powerful influence over the philosophy of art and design at the school.²³³ His theories were disseminated through his influential design source book *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856), which drew attention to the common principles that underpin the decorative arts across historical periods and cultures.²³⁴ The book featured lavish chromolithographs and pioneered theories of colour and flat patterning whose influence can be seen in Waller’s decorative expression. It contained prominent examples of ornament from across the world, lavishly illustrated in colour and printed by Francis Bedford. Numerous copies of the book were purchased by design schools in Australia, including the National Gallery Art School, providing Waller with ready access to this seminal work.²³⁵

![Figure 13: Plate IV of Owen Jones’ *The Grammar of Ornament*: Illustrated by Examples from Various Styles of Ornament, London: Day and Son, 1856](image13.png)

![Figure 14: The Lords of Venus (detail) from: *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs*, 1932, Melbourne: Golden Arrow Press, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1976](image14.png)

Examples of Egyptian and Celtic ornament in *The Grammar of Ornament* have aesthetic synergies with motifs and symbols Waller incorporated into her mature practice. This indicates that she was familiar with Jones’ publication. His identification of these examples prefigures both the Celtic Revival of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth

²³³ Ibid., pp. 37–41.
centuries, and widespread fascination with ancient Egyptian culture in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Jones argued that “Egyptian art is superior to all that followed it, and inferior only to itself”, and maintained that the success of ornament depends upon the degree to which it was developed though close engagement with the natural world. The illustrations of the lotus flower on Plate IV of The Grammar of Ornament [Figure 13] have strong parallels with Waller’s treatment of the motif in her art, especially in The Great Breath and The Gates of Dawn. This is particularly apparent when the illustrations are compared with Waller’s treatment of the lotus in The Lords of Venus from The Great Breath [Figure 14].

Figurehead of the Arts and Crafts Movement William Morris also played an important role in developing the collection of the South Kensington Museum to facilitate art training. Its core principles were the conception of the public museum having the dual functions of collecting art and offering practical art training. These functions worked together to elevate standards of taste and ensure the longevity of British—and, by extension, colonial Australian—design, which had declined from the second half of the eighteenth century as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution and the replacement of traditional handmade craftwork produced by guilds with machine made products.

In colonial Victoria, the South Kensington system was modelled on sister institutes in Great Britain, in particular the technical schools that emerged in Scotland in the 1820s, and quickly expanded across Great Britain and Ireland. Scholar Frances Gunn has examined the developments of technical education in colonial Victoria and stressed the influence of British technical education on Victorian technical schools.

At these schools, art tuition, then viewed as a trade, was offered to enrolled

237 McFarlane also noted Waller’s interest in Egyptian art and design in her analysis of The Great Breath.
238 Training through the South Kensington system was facilitated through the development of a public art collection and museum. The museum underwent a series of evolutions alongside the training system, and was first established in 1852 at Marlborough House under the name of the Museum of Manufactures (later the Museum of Ornamental Art) before adopting the name of the South Kensington Museum, which it held until 1899, when the current name, the Victoria and Albert Museum, was adopted.
241 The South Kensington system also influenced art education and the philosophy of public museums in other colonies including Canada, India and New Zealand.
This method of art training initially aimed to produce skilled artisans, not fine artists. The system—by working in tandem with museums—sought to instil a sense of ‘taste’ into the minds and artistic creations of graduates. A major component of the students’ curriculum was copying existing artworks to the finest detail, rather than developing original compositions. Nonetheless, the emphasis on fine draughtsmanship and rigorous tuition was a legacy transferred to Australia by the many migrant artists-cum-teachers who arrived in the nineteenth century.

In Australia, the system had a different effect on art education than it had in Great Britain. Art historian Caroline Jordan has argued that in the colonies, art schools and museums embraced the system in theory more often than in practice. Inception of a public museum and gallery with its own art school was a model embraced by the NGV and, less successfully, the Art Gallery of Ballarat, but was only embraced by a few Australian institutions. Joseph Burke (1913–92), inaugural Herald Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne, wrote of being “struck by the influence of the Royal College of Art in South Kensington” when he arrived in Australia in 1947. Burke went on to assert that “South Kensington had indeed trained inspectors and teachers whose influence in this country it would be hard to over-estimate”. Burke’s comments, though critical of the rigidity of the system as it was embraced in Australia, reinforce the tangible influence it exerted in Melbourne well into the twentieth century.

Waller’s painting teacher at the National Gallery Art School, Hall, completed his studies under the South Kensington system, which signals that its principles were, to a greater or lesser degree, passed on to Waller. Although, as Hall’s biographer Gwen Rankin has suggested, he eventually found the South Kensington system restrictive, its rigorous standards had a significant impact on his art. He studied part-time at

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247 Ibid.
the School of Design in South Kensington between 1874 and 1877 under English painter Edward Poynter (1836–1919). Poynter’s reputation of demanding technical perfection from his students was perpetuated by Hall when he became a teacher. (Hall’s influence on Waller’s art practice is expanded on later in this chapter.) Having established the background of the art tuition Waller received, attention now moves to analyse each phase of her formal education as an artist.

Towards an Artistic Career: Waller’s Tuition in Castlemaine

Although Waller commenced art training in the first decade of the twentieth century, the philosophies of art discussed above underscored the tuition she received. The juvenilia she produced signal her attraction to art with mythical narratives, particularly Celtic narratives, which linked to her heritage. Waller began studying at the Castlemaine School of Mines in 1905, aged 10, when she was living with her family in her hometown of Castlemaine, where the importance of her ancestry and her interest in art emerged.

Waller’s ties to her English and Celtic heritage, and the central role of spirituality in her life, can be traced back to her family. Her paternal ancestors migrated from England to Australia over several voyages in the 1840s. Waller’s paternal great-grandfather, Cornish glazier John Yandell (1801–85), kept a log during his voyage from Plymouth, England to South Australia in 1849–50 that indicates the central role the Methodist faith held in his life. Throughout it he referred to his faith, writing on one day that he had been “preaching morn and noon, [and had attended a] prayer meeting at night.” Although not uncommon at that time, such references provide insight into the family milieu in which Waller was raised. Other members of the Yandell family migrated from England, including her great-uncle, son of John Yandell, Augustus Courts Yandell (1831–99), who worked as a herbalist. The Yandell family moved to Castlemaine at some point in the 1850s, where Christian’s

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249 Ibid., pp. 12–13, 15.
252 See: John Yandell, “[Copy of] Logbook of the Journey from Plymouth to South Australia,” 6 January 1850. Yandell Family Archive, Private Collection, WA.
253 Ibid.
father, William Edward Yandell (1857–99), was born and Augustus Courts Yandell served as Mayor in 1888–89.\textsuperscript{254}

Waller’s mother, Emily St Claire Yandell née James (1857–1930), was an English migrant who married William Edward Yandell in Melbourne in 1879.\textsuperscript{255} She was one of the thousands of migrants from England—including many from Cornwall—who settled in Victoria during the period from the 1850s until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.\textsuperscript{256} Waller was the youngest of the couple’s seven children, and took pride in mystical associations with the number seven.\textsuperscript{257}

Little biographical material can be traced relating to Waller’s life during the period 1894–1909; however her talent for visual expression was noted in newspaper articles.\textsuperscript{258} Descendants of her siblings state that practical engagement with the visual arts was encouraged by the family, especially by Waller’s mother and her sister Florence ‘Cheerie’ Champion Yandell, later Sclater.\textsuperscript{259} Nine years Waller’s senior, Florence Yandell was also very spiritually-directed and pursued an interest in the visual arts, and wrote poetry, drew and painted from a young age.\textsuperscript{260} This has been ascertained through the scant surviving

\begin{figure}[h]
\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure15.jpg}
\end{center}
\caption{Florence ‘Cheerie’ Yandell (later Sclater), Petition, c. 1901, pastel, pencil and inks paper, private collection, Western Australia.}
\end{figure}

\begin{verse}
256 Charles Fahey, Cornish Miners in Bendigo (Footscray, VIC: Footscray Institute of Technology, Humanities Dept., 1984), p. 3.
257 Edward and Emily Yandell’s children were: Mary Ann, born Carlton, Victoria in 1879; William Edward born Carlton, Victoria in 1880; Florestine, born Carlton Victoria in 1883 (died aged twelve days); Florence ‘Cheerie’ Champion, born Carlton, Victoria in 1885; Andrew St Clair, born Carlton, Victoria 1888; Wilhelmina James, born 1891, Fitzroy North.
258 “Painting in Oils: Promising Castlemaine Student,” p. 3; “A Rising Child Artist (Miss Christian Yandell) and Her Pictures,” p. 13; Thomas and Jordan, “Chronology,” p. 12
259 Florence Champion Yandell married Alexander Sclater in 1904. Sclater facilitated Christian Waller’s early art tuition. The Sclater’s children were Christian Douglas (known as Cliff) (b. 1906), Cylite (later Klytie) Pate née Sclater (1912–2010) and Alex Sclater Klytie was raised by Christian and Napier Waller from the age of about twelve, after Florence Sclater eloped with her brother-in-law and Alexander Sclater remarried and moved to England.
260 She did not receive formal art tuition, and went into domestic service after her father’s sudden death in 1899.
\end{verse}
primary material and through interviews with Waller’s great-nieces.261

Specifically, there is a pastel drawing accompanying a transcription of a spiritual poem entitled *Petition* (c. 1901) [Figure 15]. The drawing, which is signed with Florence Yandell’s nickname ‘Cheerie’ bottom right below the image, depicts a luscious English-style garden either side of a dirt path leading into the horizon. The poem is transcribed below the image and is a petition to the Lord to be granted a garden where nature—especially flowers and the weather—can be enjoyed and the Lord can be met in a situation where his “great laws” can be understood. The text incorporates floral and solar embellishments as well as decorative majuscule, which demonstrate an awareness of illuminated manuscripts. Both the text and the image are enclosed within decorative purple borders. The spiritual subject matter, dream-like quality of the drawing and embellishments have parallels with Christian Waller’s practice, and the fact her sister shared her interest demonstrates there was a family environment in which these interests were fostered.

The fact that Waller was raised in a family that supported the arts is reinforced by evidence I have uncovered in newspapers that indicates Waller’s father also had an interest in creative pursuits. He served as the stage mechanist for the professional 1882 production of *The Black Flag* at Melbourne’s Bijou Theatre on Collins Street.262 He also held a miner’s licence but worked chiefly as a plasterer. In an 1894 advertisement in the *Mount Alexander Mail* he described himself as: “Designer, Headstone, Tombstones, and Monuments. Plasterer and Contractor… Repairing and Coloring done”, and lists his uncle, Augustus Courts Yandell, as his agent.263 The fact he listed himself as a designer foremost indicates that this was his main professional undertaking.

As a child, Waller began her schooling at the Castlemaine South Public School in 1901, staying there through to 1905. In 1905 she began studying art at the Castlemaine School of Mines. The School opened in 1887, following a campaign by the local Council (which included Augustus Courts Yandell) to establish a training institution in the town. The School had two branches: art and science; the science

261 Waller’s great-nieces are June McAuliffe and Jane Carmichael.

*June McAuliffe Interviewed by Grace Blakeley-Carrol.;* Carmichael, *Jane Carmichael Interviewed by Grace Blakeley-Carroll Via Phone.*

262 Stage mechanists—or technicians—put together and assemble stages and sets for live performances.

stream focussed on mining engineering whereas the art stream encompassed architecture, drawing, surveying and building construction. Then aged ten, and the youngest of six surviving children raised by a widow, it would not have been uncommon for adolescents in her situation to leave school and go into service, as her sister Florence Yandell did following their father’s death in 1899. While information concerning how Waller came to study art is not available, based on the family background I have outlined above, it is logical to assume that the Yandells valued artistic pursuits and were inclined to support Waller’s tuition. These included foundational influences such as the Arts and Craft Movement and Pre-Raphaelitism, which had a major influence on the formal and aesthetic development of her work.

Waller’s Art Master at Castlemaine School of Mines was Steiner, whose brother James Harvey Steiner married her relative Elsie Florence Yandell in 1899. Steiner, himself one of the first graduates of the School, was described as being “dedicated to his work, keenly interested in the success of the students and a friend and adviser to all”. Steiner established himself “as an outstanding educator and a highly respected citizen…[who] inspired confidence [in his students]”. Waller therefore began her studies under a supportive and dedicated teacher.

Steiner assumed the positions of Art Master and Science Master in 1897, and was appointed Principal of the School in 1917. Contemporary accounts of the School praised his exemplary art tuition. In 1900 in an article in the Bendigo Advertiser reported that: “Mr. Carl Steiner, art master of the local School of Mines, has brought his pupils up to a very high state of efficiency”. This comment suggests that art students were not producing works of a high standard until after Steiner’s appointment. Indeed, in 1902 the Bendigo Advertiser reported a visit by the Director of Education Mr Tate to the School, where he drew staff and councillors’ attention to the unsatisfactory standards. Only the art department, under Steiner’s management,

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265 Although Florence Yandell was able to pursue artistic interests. McAuliffe, “June McAuliffe Interviewed by Grace Blakeley-Carroll.”
266 Ibid.
268 Ibid.
269 “Late Local News “, Bendigonian 8 March 1917, p. 10.
270 “Our Country Service,” Bendigo Advertiser 21 December 1900, p. 3.
was spared Tate’s criticism.271 By the time Waller began studying at the School, Steiner’s modifications to the curriculum had been tried and tested, and their success was affirmed by the increased enrolment in—and graduation from—the classes. In 1900 alone he prepared 165 students for examinations, up from 24 during his first year at the School.272

Although studying under a good teacher, Waller was disadvantaged compared to art students in Melbourne. Castlemaine did not have a public gallery until 1913, meaning that as a young art student Waller was unable to visit a local gallery or museum for inspiration and to further her knowledge of art. Instead, she relied on reproductions of artworks in the books held by the Castlemaine Public Library, which was founded in 1860.273 Accordingly, it is highly likely that, from an early age, Waller looked to reproductions and mythic narratives in books, and engaged her imaginative faculty to extend her learning beyond the classroom.

None of Waller’s artworks or personal ephemera from her Castlemaine years survive. It is, therefore, impossible to offer any concrete critical judgment on Waller’s artistic development during this time. Scant information regarding Steiner survives, further limiting analysis of the art tuition at the Castlemaine School of Mines. My focus therefore turns to the second phase of Waller’s art tuition.

### Bendigo: The Foundation of Waller’s Art Practice

After her family moved to Bendigo in 1908, Waller, now a teenager, began studying art under experienced teacher Hugh Fegan, who had taught at the Bendigo School of Mines and Industries for many years and was then working independently as an art tutor.274 Under his tutelage, she drew together various spiritual influences on her art and life and expressed them in her artworks. The evolution of her mature style can be directly traced back to this period, in particular through the Bendigo Sketchbook. It was also while studying in Bendigo that she first attracted critical praise. The

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272 “Our Country Service,” p. 3.
location, moreover, provided strong ties to her Cornish ancestry, which was a source of pride to the family.\footnote{McAuliffe, “June McAuliffe Interviewed by Grace Blakeley-Carroll.”} She embraced her heritage as a key influence in her art from that time onwards. A survey of the origins and teaching philosophy of the School provides a useful platform for appraising how her tuition under Fegan, who had a long career there, informed her mature art practice.

Planning for the School began in 1854, at the height of the Victorian Gold Rush.\footnote{The Bendigo School of Mines and Industries, The Bendigo School of Mines and Industries 1873–1923, Jubilee Souvenier (Bendigo: The Bendigo School of Mines and Industries, 1923), p. 2.} The town of Bendigo (officially called Sandhurst between 1853 and 1891) was at the centre of the gold rush in the 1850s, and flourished from the first discovery of gold in 1851. By 1854 a town had emerged, and educational institutions to cater for the expanding population were established. Similar to the situation in Castlemaine outlined above, a need for a design and art school was noted by citizens and councillors, keen to equip miners and tradesmen with skills to enhance their work.\footnote{Frank Cusack, Canvas to Campus: A History of the Bendigo Institute of Technology (Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press, 1973), pp. 1–6.}

The principles of tuition at Bendigo School of Mines and Industries that Fegan no doubt continued as a private tutor were not markedly different from those received by students in Britain in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Technical institutes of its kind, as social historian Peter Timms has shown, were primarily focussed on producing skilled tradesmen to work in the local mining industry.\footnote{Peter Timms, “Art Education in the Schools and Technical Colleges,” in Designing Australia: Readings in the History of Design, ed. Michael Bogle (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 38.}

Upon its opening in 1856, classes in chemistry, metallurgy, assaying and other related subjects were offered.\footnote{Industries, The Bendigo School of Mines and Industries 1873–1923, Jubilee Souvenier, p. 4.} Its core philosophy was to fulfil local need and uplift society through education.\footnote{Cusack, Canvas to Campus: A History of the Bendigo Institute of Technology, pp. 7–8.} Indeed, Paul McGillivray, President of the Bendigo School of Mines Science Society (a group associated with the School), declared, in his inaugural address to the Society, “that if we only exert ourselves, the Bendigo School of Mines Science Society may be made a power for good in promoting a taste for the higher knowledge amongst us.”\footnote{Paul Howard MacGillivray, “Inaugural Address, Delivered to the Bendigo School of Mines Science Society,” (Sandhurst: Bendigo School of Mines Society, June 20, 1881), p. 6.} Judging by McGillivray’s sentiments, the School continued the model of the numerous technical and mechanical schools established
in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Students benefitted from the art tuition they received at the Bendigo School of Mines and Industries. This is despite the fact that, in the initial phases of the School’s history, training in art and design was, a secondary concern. Where there was an emphasis on teaching so-called fine arts, such courses were not viable in the long-term due to a dearth of students, probably because art was not seen as vocational as other courses on offer.\textsuperscript{282} In 1870, recommendations were made to develop a School of Design, and it emerged the following year.\textsuperscript{283} Indeed, the curriculum expanded and the standards of teaching improved by the first decade of the twentieth century as the mining industry in the region dwindled; because fewer people were needed in the mining sector, more were free to take up visual art education. Although praised for its art tuition, in its first years of operation the School did not focus on turning pupils into artists. By the mid-1880s private tuition was offered in architecture and technical drawing, amongst other subjects, indicating the shifting emphasis of the School.\textsuperscript{284} Middle-class day students—later including adolescent girls like Waller—populated the art classes.

In 1879, Hugh Fegan succeeded F. Taylor as the instructor for the School of Design.\textsuperscript{285} He formally took up his post in February 1880 and continued to teach at the School for many years.\textsuperscript{286} Fegan also held the position of Drawing Master in state schools within the district of Bendigo.\textsuperscript{287} He was described as being “efficient in every branch of his profession” and “was most painstaking with his pupils, and had the interest of the school at heart”.\textsuperscript{288} These comments offer a useful though opaque impression of Fegan and imply that his devotion to his students accounted for the increase in enrolments in his classes. The fact he later pushed for Waller to study at the National Gallery Art School is a further sign of his dedication.\textsuperscript{289} She again had access to tuition by a distinguished teacher with a reputation for fostering student talent.

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., p. 39.
\textsuperscript{283} Cusack, Canvas to Campus: A History of the Bendigo Institute of Technology, pp. 37–38.
\textsuperscript{284} Industries, The Bendigo School of Mines and Industries 1873–1923, Jubilee Souvenir, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{285} “Progression, Our Rights, and Our Resources,” Bendigo Advertiser 14 February 1879, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{286} “School of Mines,” Bendigo Advertiser 31 January 1880, p. 3; Thomas and Jordan, “Chronology,” p. 10.
\textsuperscript{287} “Progression, Our Rights, and Our Resources,” Bendigo Advertiser 15 July 1892, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{288} “School of Mines,” Bendigo Advertiser 12 August 1892, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{289} “Exhibition of Pictures,” Bendigo Advertiser 29 November 1909, p. 2.
The variety of drawing skills Waller successfully learnt in Bendigo attests to Fegan’s skills in teaching. Shortly after taking up his position in Bendigo, his determination to raise the standard of his students’ work was shown in an article in the *Bendigo Advertiser* published in 1880 which states that: “Mr. Fegan has introduced some changes in the arrangement of the [art] classes, and has been giving greater prominence to practical geometry and perspective.” This is one of the few published comments about the School’s curriculum under Fegan’s leadership. The fact he gave ‘greater prominence’ to practical geometry and perspective studies signals that these changes were made in order to refine students’ technical skills, enabling them to create original designs and artworks on more solid foundations.

The syllabus of the School’s art course that Waller encountered under its former teacher Fegan when she was presumably using the *Bendigo Sketchbook* was installed in the 1890s. In that decade the Art courses were altered significantly to meet the standards of art tuition. The fruits of this are evident in the sketchbook, which contains perspective studies and measurements alongside studies of historic pattern and ornament, indicating a rounded training in visual art. This is seen on two pages [Figure 16] where Waller has incorporated guiding lines to assist with adding depth to illustrations of houses and rural scenes. Elsewhere [Figure 17] she drew a series of tile designs from various periods, including the Gothic, and has used different forms of linework to effectively highlight the materials she is depicting. These demonstrate the range of drawing skills she successfully developed as well as her artistic flexibility.

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290 “School of Mines,” p. 3.
291 This occurred following the unveiling of a new building dedicated to the Art Department in 1889
292 Ibid., p. 82.
The influence of the South Kensington system on art classes under Fegan’s direction is reflected in the drawing exercises he set for students. One student was sculptor Carola ‘Ola’ Cohn (1892–1964), who studied at the School between c. 1907–19, who met Christian Waller in Bendigo.293 In her autobiography, Cohn bemoaned the rigidity of tuition at the School:

The teaching of children in those days was not made interesting as it is to day [c. 1950]. We were shown how to draw straight lines and to copy from simple designs printed on thick paper, and later learnt ‘object drawing’.294 Cohn’s impressions of the tuition she received in Bendigo suggest the art classes followed the South Kensington model of teaching the principles of art through a series of drawing exercises and the copying of works of art (almost certainly through reviewing printed reproductions). Her reference to copying designs and drawing straight lines highlights the School’s emphasis on technical proficiency.

Waller came to study under Fegan after her family moved to Bendigo around 1908. They settled in the suburb of Long Gully, which had a strong Cornish community.295 Long Gully is located about four kilometres from the School and less than one kilometre from the Bendigo Art Gallery. As Colman has shown, Cornish miners comprised a significant portion of the migrants who came to Victoria in search of gold, settling in various towns, including Ballarat, Creswick, Clunes, Maldon, Bendigo

293 Cohn wrote of commencing her studies when she was twelve years old in her autobiography, earlier than listed in other sources, which list 1910 as the year when she began studying at the Bendigo School of Mines.


294 Cohn’s autobiography, edited by Barbara Lemon was published in 2014.


295 Waller’s art tuition may have been a contributing factor to the move, given that Bendigo had a public gallery.

During her time in Bendigo Waller increasingly identified with her Celtic ancestry. Her friend Mary Millward gifted a copy of the collected works of English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), inscribing the inner cover is inscribed with “Christian Carlyle Yandell from Mary Millward, December 1909, with good wishes”. Waller’s first two middle names—Marjorie and Emily—are not included, instead only her third—Carlyle—which was a family name of Celtic etymology.

Waller was obviously known as ‘Christian Carlyle Yandell’ by her friend who chose a book of poetry by Coleridge; a poet influenced by Celtic literature. Further, Waller placed the bookplate she made for herself in the early 1930s in the inner cover and kept the book in her bedroom towards the end of her life, signalling its importance to her.

It was during her time as a student in Bendigo that Waller drew together various influences on her art and life and expressed them through storytelling by drawing on myths and legends, and adding a personal interpretation to often familiar subject matter. This is seen in the Classical-themed paintings A Petition and A Lady of Thermopylae (both 1909) that I analyse later in this chapter. Her recourse to these myths and narratives can be directly traced back to this period, in particular through the c. 1909 sketchbook she kept.

The Role of Sketching in Waller's Practice: The Bendigo Sketchbook

During the course of this research, I uncovered previously unknown artworks and sketchbooks that facilitate critical assessment of Waller’s juvenile art. Familiarity with

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296 As Cornish migrants to Australia were listed as ‘English’ on their passenger cards, scholars have been unable to identify the exact number of Cornish migrants who came to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century; it is thought to be in the thousands. Anne Colman, “Colonial Cornish: Cornish Immigrants in Victoria, 1865–1880” (MA, University of Melbourne, 1985), p. 82.


298 Specifically, from Old Welsh ‘caer’, which means ‘fortress’ or ‘stronghold’.


300 Observed by the author during a visit to the Waller House in July 2013.
Waller’s juvenilia is essential in order to critically analyse the technical attributes and symbolism of her mature art. Although the praise she received for her early efforts lives on in newspaper clippings, the location of the artworks that gave rise to these favourable words is unknown. As previously mentioned, the most significant finding is the *Bendigo Sketchbook* [Figure 18], which dates from this time. It provides significant new evidence that the artistic and spiritual interests that shaped her mature art were manifest from her youth. The *Sketchbook* is a humble object, encased in a flimsy cardboard cover with the words “School Exercise Book”, with “C. Yandell, Langston, Bendigo” inscribed in pencil on the inner cover.

On the one hand, the sketches in the *Bendigo Sketchbook* are typical of what one would expect from a fourteen-year-old art student, as seen in repeated attempts at signing her name on the first page and drawings of parts of the human body; eye, nose, lips, ears and foot. The sketches of historical costume, pattern and ornament as well as perspective studies and annotations regarding Classical painting and sculpture, however, highlight the intelligence and talent of the artist. Looking through the sketchbook one gets the sense of a young student exploring different drawing techniques to add tone and depth to her work, whilst also investigating historical applications of pattern, ornament and symbolism; her annotations indicate the latter.

A sketchbook kept by a fellow student of Waller’s at the National Gallery Art School, further highlights the depth of Waller’s interest in history, symbolism and mythology. Idalia McKail (1886–1980) and Waller were in the same drawing class in 1911. McKail’s sketchbook, now at State Library Victoria, includes some

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301 Despite an exhaustive search, the author was unable to uncover any artworks produced prior to 1920, other than those works mentioned in the thesis.

302 Waller, “Bendigo Sketchbook.”
annotations, such as a quote from Tennyson’s poem *Sir Lancelot and Guinevere* (1842), and a drawing entitled *Street of Mercury, Pompeii* [Figure 19].\(^{303}\) Despite some similarities in subjects there is a marked contrast in terms of the depth of engagement with these ideas.

By contrast, over several pages Waller wrote detailed notes regarding the art, spirituality and quotidian lives of the Pompeians, suggesting that her art class was studying the ancient town. On one page, [Figure 20], she has made extensive notes about different pigments used in Pompeian wall painting, signalling a keen interest in traditional painting methods as well as the communication of myths through art. On the opposite page she sketched several intricate Pompeian artefacts, including six different urns each with distinct patterns and figure details as well as a recreated candelabra. The depiction of a dancing faun and a centaur on page fifteen [Figure 21] is the earliest known reference to spirituality in her practice, and demonstrates her awareness of Classical mythology. Although these are sketches in lead pencil, Waller’s attention to detail is apparent, which demonstrate her knowledge of different forms of Pompeian ornament.

\(^{303}\) Idalia McKail, “Sketchbook of Idalia McKail When she was a Student at the National Art Gallery”, H82.37/1, c. 1908–11. State Library Victoria, Melbourne.
Fascination with the ancient town was common at that time. In March 1909 the popular silent film *Last Days of Pompeii* (1908) was one of the debut films shown at Bendigo’s Princess Theatre when it was transformed into a picture theatre by the prominent firm J. and N. Tait.\(^3\) Whereas Waller took pains to detail the art, culture and history of the Pompeian people, McKail merely drew a sketch, presumably from a photograph or a print, and made no further reference to the ancient town nor to ancient Roman culture and art.

Clearly, then, the *Bendigo Sketchbook*—produced as it was by the adolescent Waller—reveals the depth of her engagement with art, history and the symbolic use of pattern and ornament. The sketches and annotations therein foreshadow the themes and ideas of the sketchbooks Waller kept as a mature artist, evidencing the interest in historical ornament and design, as well as the symbolic functions of colours, forms and shapes that were developed in her practice.

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In the *Bendigo Sketchbook*, Waller’s sketches of Pompeii foreshadow a number of key influences that underscore her mature art: the art and culture of ancient and mythic cultures, architecture, wall painting (mural art), precious stones and colour symbolism. Waller sketched a portrait that she titled *Jewish Bride* [Figure 22], wearing the traditional Yemeni headdress (called a qurush) adorned with coins. The portrait occupies a whole page and depicts the figure’s head and shoulders, with her face looking directly at the viewer. Loose rendering of her clothing and the fabric component of the headdress indicate this was a quick sketch. However, the treatment of the headdress, earring and necklace show a familiarity with the narrative, which was a popular religious theme.

The *Bendigo Sketchbook* reveals that Waller’s tuition in Bendigo fostered the interest in historic and mythic themes that underscored her *œuvre*. Her meticulous notes suggest that Fegan was focussing on the art and life of Pompeians in art classes; encouraging his students not simply to look at the formal, decorative qualities of the art, design and architecture of Pompeii, but to appreciate the society. Annotations in the *Bendigo Sketchbook* refer to the use of different flowers for different occasions: “roses & lilies & amaranthus & parsley and myrtle were often used as funeral plants”. Waller’s annotations elsewhere on the same page also refer to the decorative use of plants—ivy, cypress, fig trees, etc.—in domestic settings. These notes reveal her early exposure to the symbolic and functional use of plants and flowers. The detail on these illustrations reveals considerable intense study, either *en plein air* or from reproductions.

Waller’s interest in using natural imagery in her art may owe a debt to the language of flowers, which was revived in literary and artistic circles in England in the nineteenth century. The language of flowers ascribed specific symbolism to flowers and was of medieval pagan origin. Although widely used by artists well into the twentieth

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305 Waller, “Bendigo Sketchbook.”
century, it had associations with occultism.\textsuperscript{307} In 1884, an edition illustrated by acclaimed children’s book author illustrator Kate Greenaway (1846–1901) was published in London.\textsuperscript{308} Given the fact this version included illustrations and explanations of floral symbolism of hundreds of plant species, Waller may have used it as a source for her \textit{My Book of Flowers} (1920) and floral symbols.\textsuperscript{309} Throughout her \textit{œuvre} Waller employed natural imagery to give personal meaning to her works, as is discussed in the following chapters. The explicit connections between nature and symbolism in the \textit{Bendigo Sketchbook} demonstrate that this connection was something she explored during her years as a student.

Fegan’s impact on Waller was not limited to improving her drawing technique. The fact she earned attention for her imaginative and accomplished style from the art communities in Bendigo, Castlemaine and Melbourne while a student with Fegan, indicates that he fostered her individuality and encouraged its distinctive expression. In 1909, Waller’s painting \textit{A Petition} (c. 1909) [Figure 23] was shown at the Bendigo Art Gallery in upon the suggestion of Waller’s brother-in-law Alexander Sclater.\textsuperscript{310}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure23}
\caption{Figure 23: A Petition, 1909, oil on canvas, reproduced in: \textit{Bendigonian}, 7 December 1909, p. 23, whereabouts unknown}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure24}
\caption{Figure 24: A Lady of Thermopylae, 1909, oil on canvas, reproduced in: \textit{Bendigonian}, 7 December 1909, p. 23, whereabouts unknown}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., p. 138.
\textsuperscript{309} Kate (illustrator) Greenaway and Jean (author) Marsh, \textit{Language of Flowers} (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1884), unpaginated.
\textsuperscript{310} “Bendigo Art Gallery: Committee Meeting,” p. 4; Thomas and Jordan, “Chronology,” p. 10.
The painting depicted a scene from the second Persian invasion of Greece (480–479 BCE) that occurred under Xerxes the Great (519–466 BCE). The Classical narrative demonstrates that Waller’s taste for depicting historical and mythic narratives was apparent from her earliest known artworks. Although the work does not survive, a black-and-white reproduction from the Bendigonian assists in the analysis of it. The style and composition of it and another painting *A Lady of Thermopylae* [Figure 24] were based on engravings of artworks by the prominent Dutch-born Victorian artist Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1839–1912), engravings of whose works were reproduced in popular art journals including the *Art Journal* and the *Studio*. Waller may have encountered these journals during the course of her studies, which were widely circulated in art schools in Australia. Later in 1909, both paintings were exhibited in the Bendigo Masonic Hall, and received high praise, according to local press accounts.

*A Lady of Thermopylae* depicts a mother and her two daughters listening to a harpist performing in front of them. The surviving newspaper photograph is of poor quality, which limits analysis. It is clear, however, that Waller tackled a range of surfaces, gestures and textures in the painting: portraits, hands (playing the harp), natural scenery, marble and drapery. Commentary in the *Mount Alexander Mail* adds to our understanding of the painting:

The figure paintings are not quite so commendable as the landscape scenery, but the structural embellishments from the massive Grecian walls to the marbled doors are ideally represented. The ‘accessories’, in the way of floral adornments and rich drapings [drapery], could not have been executed better by one many years older as a student. The picture is indeed a remarkable reflection from an original brain, and this young girl is winning well deserved recognition.

This balanced review praises aspects of the painting whilst also noting areas for improvement, and implies that these reflect the age of the artist. The description of the work as “a remarkable reflection from an original brain” demonstrates that her

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311 Ibid.
312 “A Rising Child Artist (Miss Christian Yandell) and Her Pictures,” p. 13.
313 An article featuring several of Alma-Tadema’s engravings was published in a 50th anniversary anthology of the *Art Journal* in 1900, and also in the 1901 edition of the journal.
316 “Painting in Oils: Promising Castlemaine Student,” p. 3.
work was unlike that created by other students in Bendigo at the time. Indeed, other students—including Cohn—did not receive the public praise and support that Waller enjoyed, further demonstrating her singular artistic gifts.

In *A Petition*, Waller adopted a ground-level perspective showing a side-view of a ceremonial offering at the shrine of Pallas Athene. The Greek vessels in the painting resemble those on page five of the *Bendigo Sketchbook*. Waller sketched half a dozen vases each featuring traditional ornaments of ancient Greek pottery: acanthus leaves, mythological scenes, etc. This suggests she studied the art, design and history of this period, and brought these together in her paintings. Comments made by the unnamed *Mount Alexander Mail* reporter corroborate this argument: “[A Petition is] Another originally designed picture, and one which apparently caused much research work in order to justify dress, scenery and incident...” 317 The work shows remarkable technical abilities for a fourteen-year-old artist, as well as her understanding of art history that is reflected in the accuracy of the clothing.

The narrative and composition of *A Petition* was also detailed in *Mount Alexander Mail*, indicating the high public regard for the work. The unnamed reporter observed:

> The Grecian lady, with her slave in the background, is offering tribute to the Goddess of War, and praying for success in the battle of Salamis... The wealth of colour entailed in this production is harmoniously and judiciously displayed, and the casket of jewels—(the offering)—and vases are painted quite realistically. 318

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317 Ibid.
318 Ibid.
In devising this image, Waller may have been familiar with Alma-Tadema’s *The Vintage Festival* (1871) [Figure 25] which was acquired by the NGV in 1888 and—two decades later—was still one of the most expensive and popular works on display.\(^{319}\)

Following the positive reception of *A Petition* and *A Lady of Thermopylae* at Singer’s on Collins Street in central Melbourne in February 1910, the paintings received further praise in the press.\(^{320}\) A review of Waller’s “remarkable efforts in pictorial art” in the *Argus* praised her ability to interpret the mythic themes through the medium of painting:

> The subjects and arrangement are evidently inspired by a study of Alma Tadema’s engraved works, and their execution shows that they have been carried through without reference to models, either for figure or draperies. The ambition of the youthful painter is extraordinary, and that she has been able to accomplish so much with imagination as her chief resource is still more extraordinary…they are promising achievements for one so young, who is merely a child in appearance.\(^{321}\)

This reference to Waller’s early efforts again indicates that her talents were of an unusually-high standard for such a young artist.

The success of the exhibitions of *A Petition* and *A Lady of Thermopylae* facilitated Waller’s artistic advancement. After the paintings were displayed at the Bendigo Masonic Hall, at the end of 1909, the *Bendigo Advertiser* reported on efforts to assist “Miss Yandell, the clever young Castlemaine Artist,” the article reported, “whose paintings... attracted considerable attention...”\(^{322}\) The unnamed reporter went on to detail the Mayor of Bendigo’s desire to aid her development and help her “proceed to the old world [England and Europe], and develop her talents under the master teachers”.\(^{323}\) A public campaign was launched to raise funds for her to study at the National Gallery Art School in Melbourne, the most prestigious art school in Victoria, perhaps hoping it would lead to her to study in England.\(^{324}\) The fact that the Mayor convened a meeting to discuss Waller’s talent and called for a campaign to

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321 Ibid.
322 “Personal,” p. 9.
323 Ibid.
324 Ibid., “Art Union Drawing,” *Bendigo Advertiser* 30 September 1910, p. 3.
assist her art training, proves that she was a particularly gifted artist. Her capacity to
draw on mythical and historical narratives enabled the creation of confident and
highly personal artworks including *The Great Breath* later in her life. The seeds for her
mature artistic interests were sown in her teenage years, before she moved to
Melbourne and met her husband.

**An Artist Emerges: Artistic Training in Melbourne, 1910–14**

During the next phase of Waller’s tuition her formative influences crystallised and
facilitated the creation of spiritually-directed artworks that were marked by her
singular engagement with spiritual systems and symbols. At the National Gallery Art
School in Melbourne (now Victorian College of the Arts) she studied in the drawing
workshop from 1910–12, before moving to the painting workshop, where she
studied from 1913–14. Although only a handful of artworks and studies she
completed at the School survive, evaluation of these works—in tandem with primary
sources and personal ephemera—assists in analysing the development of her
technical and symbolic approach to her art practice.

A brief discussion of the history and philosophy of the School provides a context for
Waller’s experiences as a student. Upon its formation in 1870, it was part of the
NGV; in terms of both administration and its physical location.

Initially, two
Schools were established: the School of Painting and the School of Design. The
former was led by Austrian-born artist Eugene von Guérard (1811–1901), who
migrated to Australia in 1852. As Master of the School of Painting, von Guérard
established a program modelled on that of the South Kensington system where
students copied paintings, rather than developing their own compositions.
Students entered the School of Design, under the direction of artist and teacher Thomas Clark (1813–83), where they completed rigorous academic courses. The School of Design, as art historian Leigh Astbury and others have shown, was viewed as preparing students to progress to the prestigious School of Painting.\textsuperscript{329}

The National Gallery Art School’s School of Design shared some of the curricular pressures felt by Bendigo School of Mines, yet offered a much broader curriculum that differed from the South Kensington system. The primary aim of the School of Design was to produce skilled designers to work in manufacturing, with a secondary goal of facilitating the transition of accomplished students to the School of Painting, where they could train to be fine artists. An early advertisement for the School of Design described its courses as consisting of “free hand drawing, Figure and Decorative Drawing, Mechanical and Architectural Drawing and modelling from 10am till noon and from 7pm till 9pm two days each week”.\textsuperscript{330} This advertisement reveals the range of graphic techniques taught to students in School of Design. However, as Astbury has observed, Clark paid scant attention to the first emphasis, instead teaching courses firmly grounded in fine art training.\textsuperscript{331} Nonetheless, the variety of subjects taught highlights the different objectives of the School. In this way, it had more in common with the tuition at the Royal College of Art in London which, particularly in the late-nineteenth century, was informed by Arts and Crafts values.\textsuperscript{332}

Celebrated painter Frederick McCubbin was the School’s Drawing Master when Waller studied drawing from late-1910 through to the end of 1912. Having trained under Clark from 1872 he continued to study under his successor Oswald Rose Campbell before progressing to George Frederick Folingsby’s painting class.\textsuperscript{333} McCubbin was later appointed Drawing Master in 1886 and held the role until his death in 1917.\textsuperscript{334} Art historian and curator Anne Gray has observed that McCubbin’s appointment was credited with an increase in enrolments and improvements in the  

\textsuperscript{329} Astbury, “The National Gallery School of Victoria 1870 to 1890,” p. 15–16.
\textsuperscript{330} Cited in: ibid.
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{332} Frayling, The Royal College of Art: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Art and Design, pp. 64, 71–72.
\textsuperscript{334} Gallery, Von Guérard to Wheeler, the First Teachers at the National Gallery School, 1870–1939, unpaginated.
standard of student works. He was known for his respectful and supportive teaching manner, yet shied away from hands-on instruction.

As a student McCubbin was frustrated by the rigidity of the art tuition he received and instead personally advocated painting en plein air. He was one of the founding members of the so-called Heidelberg School of painters that formed in greater Melbourne in the late-1880s, and painted the Australian bush outdoors. As a teacher he was obliged to follow the strict curriculum of the School which, as I have noted, was still modelled more or less on the South Kensington system. Gray’s outline of the curriculum at the Drawing School helps build a picture of Waller’s experience as a student:

In traditional fashion, the students stood with their paper pinned onto an easel. In the first year they copied plaster fruits (apples and pears), then progressed to plaster casts of hands and feet, and then to torsos and heads. In the second year they drew from live models, draped and nude. They drew with outlines in charcoal, and then used bread rolled into a ball to rub into the charcoal to create shading.

Clearly then, the tuition followed established curriculum that emphasised drawing in a realistic manner, developed through persistent copying from plaster casts and then from life.

An early drawing by Waller, *Untitled [Woman in Ballet Costume]* [Figure 26] likely dates from this time and shows how her drawing skills developed under McCubbin’s tutelage. Here it is clear that her drawing skills have improved since she created *Jewish Bride*—particularly in the treatment of the face—yet the work is not as refined as the life drawings she completed later in the 1910s and into the 1920s, such as *Untitled [Annotated Female Academy study]* (c. 1930–35) [Figure 27] in which she used simple, loose pencil lines to create a good likeness of her subject.

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338 This group is often referred to as the Australian Impressionists and included a number of artists, such as: Tom Roberts, Walter Withers and Charles Conder.
**Untitled [Woman in Ballet Costume]** depicts a woman with a melancholic expression seated on a stool wearing ballet shoes. She wears costuming consisting of a piece of fabric wrapped around her body from her bust to halfway down her thighs and a metal cuff on her right arm. The drawing demonstrates Waller’s understanding of anatomy through her realistic depiction of the woman’s neck muscles and collar, as well as the way the drapery folds as the figure sits on an angle with her body turned to the right and her head facing the viewer. It also shows her interest in powerful women, seen in the subject’s pose and expression. Where it is evident that this is a student work is the overworked shadow to the figure’s left, which has been executed in charcoal and graphite. Another, probably later, nude study [Figure 28] shows Waller’s development in shadow, tone and the rendering of the hair.

McCubbin flirted with alternative spiritual philosophies. Given his reputation for encouraging students, it is likely that he fostered Waller’s interest in symbolic spiritual expression. Although not a member of the Theosophical Society, McFarlane
has shown that the painter would sometime discuss Theosophy with his students. This was one of the many topics he explored in casual classroom lectures, which cultivated an atmosphere open to a wide range of artistic and intellectual ideas, from “Shakespeare, gum trees, [Louis] Buvelot, music, the theatre...” as Lindsay recalled. These talks by Waller’s eminent teacher may have shaped her conception that art is informed by the artist’s personal interests and values.

McCubbin also engaged with mystical themes in his art practice, particularly towards the end of his life, the period when Waller was one of his students. His 1905 painting, *Childhood Fancies* [Figure 29], is a rare example of a reference to fairies in his *œuvre*. This work and *What the Little Girls Saw in the Bush* (1904) each depict children in the Australian bush who are interacting with semi-hidden fairies. The Romantic, Impressionistic qualities of *Childhood Fancies* conjure an atmosphere of fantasy that is reinforced by the inclusion of fairies, McCubbin’s loose, impressionistic brush strokes and by the smatterings of vibrant green paint across the bottom half of the canvas. Having a teacher whose own work engaged with mysticism—though not to the same extent—would have legitimised Waller’s interest in this branch of art.

In contrast to McCubbin’s nurturing, hands-off approach to teaching, Waller’s painting teacher was strict and detail orientated. Hall held the roles of School Director and Painting Master during Waller’s time there. His rigorous academic European training and interest in Classical form informed his approach to art and

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341 Lindsay, “Student Days,” p. 61.
Galbally has argued that through Hall’s teaching and directorship of the NGV “high standards of aesthetic merit and craftsmanship [were brought] to the Melbourne artistic community”. These were reflected in his conviction of the necessity for a painting to be at once beautiful and executed to the highest technical standards. Such were his standards that students who had progressed through McCubbin’s drawing classes learnt drawing and painting from scratch under him. Hall had the greatest influence over the Gallery and its School of any single figure, an argument that is reinforced by the length of his tenure alone; forty-three years. The artistic merits of Waller’s art reflect the expectation of excellence under which she studied.

As the Director of the NGV, Hall possessed knowledge of contemporary international trends in the visual arts—including decorative arts and design. He travelled to England and Europe in 1905, where he sought out works of fine art for acquisition, and renewed his connections with the art and philosophies of what Australians, at that time, referred to as the ‘old world’. Hall was clearly a supporter of the visual arts in all its forms. In an essay “The Human Basis of Art”, published in the inaugural edition of the Melbourne design journal *Arts and Crafts* in October 1895, he paid homage to the decorative and applied arts:

> The impressive temple, or sculptured monument, or framed picture, came not first in the history of man’s aesthetic development—but the hut, and the cooking utensil, and, afterwards, their agreeable decoration.

Here Hall articulated the significance of the decorative and applied arts as a primary means of artistic expression and echoed Morris’ views in this regard.

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344 Galbally, “Hall, Lindsay Bernard (1859–1935).”
345 Lindsay, “Student Days,” p. 61.
347 Rankin, *L. Bernard Hall: The Man the Art World Forgot*.
348 In 1895 Hall was one of the founders of *Arts and Crafts* and his engagement with Arts and Crafts values continued into his later years, as expressed throughout his personal writings and in talks he delivered. Further information can be found in Hall’s papers at the National Gallery of Australia Research Library. See: Lindsay Bernard Hall, Papers, National Gallery of Australia Research Library, Canberra.
Far from seeing painting as ‘useless’, Hall included the medium in his philosophy of the arts, believing painting to be a craft that brought together design, composition, and a precise study of colour and tone to build up the final picture. In the course of “The Human Basis of Art” he stressed the importance of balance and harmony in composition and colour. In essence, Hall’s philosophy of art was that any work of merit was grounded in the principles of good and balanced decoration and composition. The transition from a good to a great work was made by virtue of the artist’s “will”. Given he took pains to publish articles outlining this philosophy, it is highly likely that he also extolled his views directly to students like Waller, and encouraged them to create works of the highest standard that also expressed their personal artistic spirit.

In another essay, “Art and Life”, Hall also elaborated on the difference between a student and an artist and provides insight into the artistic philosophy pupils like Waller were exposed to. In his discussion of what makes a practitioner truly an artist, Hall argued that: “He uses truth, and he uses means and material; but he only uses them as they serve him best in his life-long effort to present, or to express himself naturally and fully”\(^\text{351}\). Therefore, for Hall, a great artist was one who not only mastered their art media of choice but used their skill to express an original vision. To accomplish such mastery, Hall concluded, it was necessary to have art schools that facilitated this process: “it is incumbent upon our Art schools, museums, and galleries to keep alive sound craftsmanship and to preserve the best traditions”\(^\text{352}\). This comment provides insight into Hall’s philosophy on art tuition that indubitably informed his approach to teaching.

Enrolment records from the National Gallery Art School indicate that Waller commenced her studies in the day class of Hall’s Painting School late in 1912, and continued through to 1914.\(^\text{353}\) Graduation to this class was judged on talent, and it was common for students to remain in the Drawing School for many years; some students never graduated to Painting. Having commenced her studies sometime after March 1910, Waller spent less than eighteen months in the drawing school indicating


\(^{352}\) Ibid., p. 8.

that she was a gifted student who was quickly able to progress to the final phase of the School’s tuition.\(^{354}\)

Despite the inflexible nature of the curriculum, Waller developed proficient painting skills at the School that facilitated her work across media and equipped her with a solid foundation from which she was able to express spiritual ideas. This can be ascertained by her being awarded First Prize in the category Antique: Full Figure for Painting Students at the graduating exhibition in 1914, her final year at the School. The year before, she was awarded Second Prize in the category Painting and Life School: Painting the Head from Life.\(^{355}\) While the whereabouts of these works is unknown, her skills are evident in two surviving works from her time at the School: *A Daydream* (c. 1913–14) [Figure 30] and *Untitled [Portrait Study]* (c. 1912) [Figure 31], both of which were probably produced as class exercises.

![Figure 30: A Daydream, c. 1912, oil on board, 30 x 14 cm, private collection, Victoria](image30)

![Figure 31: Untitled [Portrait Study], c. 1912, pencil, pastel and ink on paper, private collection, Victoria](image31)

In *Untitled [Portrait Study]* Waller demonstrated her command of tone through the effective rendering. It depicts a seated woman in profile, showing her head to her

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\(^{354}\) A newspaper article published in the Argus dated 5 February 1910 detailed the public campaign to raise funds to send Waller to the Gallery School. Records of the School list her enrolment in the day classes of the drawing school in 1910. She is one of the last students on the list, suggesting that she enrolled towards the end of the year (the list is not alphabetical and appears to have been added to as each student enrolled during the year).

\(^{355}\) Gallery, Von Guérard to Wheeler, the First Teachers at the National Gallery School, 1870–1939, unpaginated; Thomas and Jordan, “Chronology,” p. 12.
thighs. Brown, beige and white shades have been deployed in this tonal study that emphasises painting skills. The influence of Hall can be seen in the precise use of white highlights on the face. The work is devoid of any emotion or symbolism, indicating it to be a student work as it is in complete contrast to the expressive qualities seen even in life drawing studies Waller made. The static quality of the figure and the focus on technique further signals that this was made to meet Hall’s exacting standards.

In *A Daydream*, Waller skillfully completed a figure and drapery study that shows some of the symbolism and imagination that distinguish her work. Her sister, Florence Sclater—who modelled for this and a number of Waller’s early works—is shown leaning against a doorframe and wearing a flowing mauve robe. Waller captured the folds of drapery and the tonal contrasts of the scene with aptitude. In *Untitled [Portrait Study]*, Waller created a seated profile of her sister using ink wash, pencil and pastel. The work is rendered in a grisaille technique that suggests it was a classroom exercise designed to show an understanding of tone before progressing to the use of colour.

Waller’s interest in historical costume and dress was fostered by the atmosphere at the School. Fancy dress parties were often held by students at the school, and would have exposed Waller to a variety of textures and dress styles that she absorbed into her symbolic, historically-flavoured artworks. She herself participated in a Nordic-themed Viking *Bal masqué* in 1913, for which she dressed as a priestess. What *A Daydream* and *Untitled [Portrait Study]* highlight is that, by virtue of her rigorous training at the School, Waller enhanced her command of painting and the ability to create realistic artworks, skills she combined with her interests in spirituality and myths to create her mature artworks.

A later work from this period, *Self Portrait* (1915) [Figure 32] also appears to be the result of a student exercise—completed after finishing her studies. It has a strong likeness and shows how much Waller’s painting skills progressed under Hall. It has been executed as a three-quarter portrait of the artist’s head and shoulders. She is shown wearing a green jacket with a Celtic-style brooch in the centre, positioned above her bust. These subtle details are the only hint the viewer receives of the subject. The rich tonal qualities of the work imbue a poignant and introspective quality that shows a debt to the Old Masters, including Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69). This is achieved by rendering the left hand side of her face in shadow, implying that the viewer is only seeing part and not all of her. The lips and nose are precisely yet subtly treated, but the portrait’s effect is slightly enigmatic. In *Self Portrait* she uses chiaroscuro to create a work that is both realistic and expressive; her serene yet focussed expression prefigures that of the portrait of her and her beloved pet.
Airedale Terriers painted by her husband nearly two decades later, *Christian Waller with Baldur, Undine and Siren at Fairy Hills* (1932) [Figure 33].  

![Figure 33: Napier Waller, Christian Waller with Baldur, Undine and Siren at Fairy Hills, 1932, oil and tempera on canvas mounted on composition board, 21.5 x 205.5 cm (framed), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1984](image1)

*Destiny* (1916) [Figure 34], a painting Waller completed shortly after leaving the School, also indicates the influence of Hall’s teaching extended beyond her student years. In this work Waller adroitly renders the flesh in paint, yet adds her personal style. Sclater again modelled for this work and assumes the character of a sorceresses.

![Figure 34: Destiny, 1916, oil on canvas, 51 x 61 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased with funds donated from the Estate of Ouida Marston, 2011](image2)

357 This portrait was a finalist in the Archibald Prize 1931 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It hung above the fireplace in the Waller House, and entered Pate’s collection upon Waller’s death. The dogs were named after mythological figures. Ephemera in the Waller House indicates that she bred Airedale Terriers and entered them in dog competitions. Her sister Florence Sclater also owned Airedales.


McAuliffe, “June McAuliffe Interviewed by Grace Blakeley-Carroll.”
watching over a mystical concoction. Here Waller appears to accomplish Hall’s view of an original artwork: the work references nature (in this instance, the human form) and was executed with skill that reflects her rigorous technical training. The bubbles, which are inhabited by trapped humans, each intricately and distinctly painted, testify to Waller’s dexterity with oil painting. Like *Self Portrait*, *Destiny* is composed of dark, muted tones. Thirdly, Waller suggests a macabre, mystical narrative through the woman dressed in medieval cloak, depicted bent over a bubbling cauldron, and the naked humans trapped in the bubbles. There is a moody, and poetic quasi-Symbolist aesthetic that is also seen in some of Hall’s paintings, including *The Quest* (c. 1905) [Figure 35]; his engagement with Symbolism continued into the inter-war period.  

Waller personally acknowledged the influence of Hall more than two decades after she graduated from his class. When he died in 1935 she sent a condolence letter to his widow. The language she used to describe Hall echoes the way she wrote about spiritual figures, writing that she and her husband were: “Feeling nothing but love and admiration for our dear master” and reflected on a recent gathering with Hall at the Lyceum Club, where they were “all together like one great family joined by that one lord. The master who had helped us in our youth”. At the end of the letter she

358 I am grateful to June McAuliffe for helping me identify the model for this and other works. Sarmiala-Berger also noted the painting’s mystical Symbolist qualities.  
360 I am grateful to Dr Susan Kellett for bringing this collection to my attention.
recalled the many happy times she had spent at Hall’s house and in his studio, a further indication of the friendship and professional mentorship he offered her.\textsuperscript{361}

Despite being a confident painting, \textit{Destiny} does not exhibit the mastery of technique and expression that characterise Waller’s mature art. The small scale and excessive darkness detract from its otherwise powerful effect. However, it foreshadows an approach that Waller harnessed over the following two decades, during which time she produced her greatest works: her printed books and her stained-glass windows.

At the School Waller learnt the importance of mastering the art media in which she worked and was encouraged to express her original artistic vision. Although principally trained in drawing and painting, she was educated in an environment where the decorative and applied arts were valued. McCubbin’s openness to alternative ideas and encouragement of his pupils meant that Waller was refining her drawing skills in an environment where her creativity was fostered. Hall’s meticulous standards of painting, in addition, enriched her understanding of tone, colour and composition as evidenced in the works she produced, which show a marked evolution from her time as a student in Bendigo.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The philosophies of art education that Waller was exposed to during her art training equipped her with the technical abilities and confidence to develop a distinctive art practice through which she expressed spiritual ideas, including those which connected to her Cornish ancestry. Her commitment to Arts and Crafts’ values of truth to nature and to impeccable standards of design were instilled in Waller when she received art tuition at schools in Castlemaine, Bendigo and Melbourne in the early twentieth century. She acquired drawing and painting proficiency through following rigorous courses of study, at the same time as she began to conceive of original artworks. Later she applied these skills to a range of media, including commercial illustrations, relief printmaking and stained glass. Previous appraisals of Waller’s art have focussed on the symbolic spiritual expression of her \textit{œuvre} without

\textsuperscript{361} Ibid.
paying sufficient attention to her rigorous technical and graphic sensibilities that reflect the quality of the tuition she received. It is by way of long practice that the mystical, spiritual symbolism of her mature work was potently expressed. In Chapter Three, attention turns to the period in Waller’s life immediately following her time at the National Gallery Art School and I analyse the book illustrations she produced in the late-1910s through to the early-1930s.
Chapter Three

Harmony of Word, Image and Message: Christian Waller, Book Illustration and *The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young*

Figure 36: Unknown photographer, Untitled [Christian Waller], c. 1915–20, gelatin silver photograph mounted on board, 20.8 x 15.0 cm (image), private collection, Canberra
In the previous chapter, I examined the formative influences on Christian Waller’s art practice. In this chapter, I establish the significance of her book illustrations and argue that illustration was a key medium through which she developed her capacity to communicate spiritual values through symbolic and decorative expression grounded in Arts and Crafts principles of design and production. This aspect of Waller’s practice has not been the main focus for scholars who have undertaken key studies on the artist, suggesting her book illustrations have not been considered as significant as the works she produced in other media, such as printmaking and stained glass.  

The majority of the books, stories, and poems she illustrated explored mystical themes. Her illustrations were created predominately during the 1920s and early 1930s, a transitional period for the artist. These illustrations reveal the extent to which her spiritual and aesthetic values overlapped.

A key aim of this chapter is to examine how Waller harnessed the art of book illustration to communicate spiritual ideas. The important impact of international fairy tale and children’s book illustrators of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries on her practice is examined. Particular attention is given to key influences I identify, including William Morris’ theories of the ‘ideal book’ and the illustrators Walter Crane (1845–1915), Harry Clark (1889–1931) and Kay Nielsen (1886–1957), in order to critically analyse Waller’s place within a broader art historical tradition of mystical book illustration. As Waller’s art was not particularly informed by Australian illustrators, attention focuses on the above-mentioned international artists, although the Australian discourse is discussed in order to provide a context for Waller’s work. The connection between mystical children’s books and illustration that emerged in response to the Victorian-era revival of Spiritualism and its subsequent fascination with—and, in many cases, belief in—fairies and alternative spiritual philosophies is outlined as it has a direct relevance on Waller’s practice.

362 Waller’s book illustrations are discussed in *The Art of Christian Waller* catalogue, however analysis focusses on her her prints and stained-glass windows. They also receive some critical attention from Sarmiala-Berger and McFarlane, who focus on Waller’s *The Great Breath*. In Organ’s previously-mentioned articles he does not analyse Waller’s broader body of work.


363 Exceptions are the page ornamentations and illustrations Waller produced for E. J. Brady’s *Australia Unlimited* in 1918 and the cover design for the 8th edition of *Our Cookery Book* (c. 1924).

Another key aim of this chapter is to show that Waller’s mystical illustrations represent a significant aspect of her œuvre as they signal her increasing drive to produce art with a spiritual message. Several of Waller’s illustrations are analysed in detail, including some that I introduce into scholarship. In the 1920s, she contributed illustrations to over a dozen children’s books, verse-stories, almanacs, poetry journals and other publications. She also produced commercial illustrations, and the few surviving examples are analysed as points of contrast to her book illustrations. Waller’s career as an illustrator was aided through her professional relationship with the publisher behind the majority of works she illustrated, Edward Alexander Vidler (1863–1942), with whom she shared spiritual and artistic concerns. Constituting her major artistic output in the years after she completed formal art tuition in 1914, these illustrations represent an important transitional period within Waller’s œuvre and its expression of her personal mythmaking, which reached its maturity in the 1930s through the attempted publication of *The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young* (1932), and other stories she wrote.

The third and final aim of this chapter is to critically analyse *The Gates of Dawn*, a work that has received minimal scholarly attention. The way in which Waller unified her spiritual and aesthetic values through book illustration is powerfully expressed in this work, which Waller wrote, illustrated, printed lithographically and sought to publish. The narrative and illustrations, I argue, were created to translate her spiritual ideas to a young audience. This book, as with the illustrations she produced in the 1920s, is an interpretation of Arts and Crafts ideals of book design and illustration. It is therefore a significant work in which Waller synthesised her aesthetic and spiritual values and, in this respect, foreshadows the trajectory of her œuvre when she explicitly created didactic art to convey spiritual messages from the late 1930s.

364 Vidler was the publisher of the vast majority of the publications Waller illustrated in the 1920s. These include: *The Renegades* (1921); *Queen Rosamond* (unpublished), (1922); *The Adventurous Elves: An Authoritative Fairy Story* (1926); *The Mad Painter and Other Bush Sketches* (1926). Additionally, he edited *Art and Letters: Hassell’s Australian Miscellany* (1921) and *The Adam Lindsay Gordon Memorial Volume* (1926).

365 Only one copy was printed in 1932. This matter is discussed later in this chapter.

Spiritual Enquiry and Book Illustration

Waller, with her deep interest in mysticism and the didactic potential of art, found an affinity with the art of book illustration. Essentially, it is a medium that sees ideas and words pictorially expressed. Illustrations augment a text by drawing on key themes and moments in the text and bringing them to life. The *OED* defines illustration as “The action or fact of illustrating”, and also “lighting up, illumination, enlightenment… spiritual (the earliest sense) or intellectual”. Given that Waller’s illustrations were produced for narratives with otherworldly themes, it is logical to speculate that the medium’s potential to ‘illuminate’ the invisible in the material world was of great appeal to her. In his study on nineteenth-century English book illustration, scholar Philip James observed that:

> an illustrated book is a partnership between author and artist to which the artist contributes something which is a pictorial comment on the author’s words or an interpretation of his [or her] meaning in another medium.

These comments reveal the role of the illustrator in enriching the reader’s experience of the book. Illustration is a ‘comment’ on the author’s text, which adds value and meaning to it. In the case of mythological texts, illustrations play an important role in depicting what does not or cannot exist in the material world. This concept of fantasy illustration being removed from reality is expressed in Waller’s imaginative illustrations.

Illustration has played an important role communicating spiritual concepts and cultural myths. Art historian John Harthan has identified an early example in Ancient Egyptian *rotuli* (papyrus rolls) of *The Book of the Dead* that dates from as far back at the thirteenth century BCE. In Europe, illustrated Christian manuscripts appeared during the seventh and eight centuries CE, and flourished during the Carolingian period of the late-eighth and early-ninth centuries. Books and illustrations were tools for meditation and prayer, and were associated with luxury due to the expense associated with making books prior to the Industrial Revolution. During the Early-Gothic period of the thirteenth century, book illustrations referenced imagery of

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371 Ibid., pp. 41–42.
372 Ibid., p. 204.
ecclesiastical stained glass. Due to the development of universities and increased literacy, they were accessible beyond the clergy and those in power. It wasn’t until the 1850s that the illustration of fiction became prevalent. In England, this coincided with a renewed interest in history and myths, particularly the Arthurian legends. Waller’s book illustrations were informed by the spiritual associations with the medium, as well as the developments in Victorian England that influenced the Australian scene.

Before analysing key examples of Waller’s book illustrations, it is important to acknowledge that artistic engagement with mythological and fantasy themes does not in itself signal a personal engagement with spiritual enquiry; though in Waller’s case, it did. Many Western artists who produced art inspired by myths and legends from the mid-seventeenth century onwards were following a broader social trend of rejecting scientific empiricism and industrialisation. This was seen in the late-nineteenth century in Britain and, for example, was reflected in what has come to be known as the Aesthetic Movement. This Movement, as art historian Stephen Calloway has shown, put forward the notion of “Art for Art’s sake”, placing beauty above any social or moral agenda. The works produced by artists did, however, engage with myth and fantasy. Leading figures such as the eminent critic Walter Pater (1839–94) encouraged artists, writers and musicians to engage with the “other world” in the pursuit of beauty and sensual pleasure. The Aesthetic Movement, therefore, had little connection with alternative spiritual enquiry such as that explored by Waller. The same was true of the Australian embrace of Aestheticism, which spread to the applied and decorative arts in Melbourne in the 1880s.

It was the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late-nineteenth century that emphasised the potential for social renewal to be advanced through the arts, including illustrated books. Reaching a peak of influence in Britain in the 1880s and in Australia from this period up until the First World War, as discussed in Chapter One, the Movement

373 Ibid., pp. 41-42.
374 Ibid., p. 204.
376 Owen, The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern, pp. 4-6.
379 However, when the Arts and Crafts Movement flourished in Australia it was, as Grace Cochrane has highlighted, without the Socialist base it had in Britain.
privileged traditional methods of artistic practices from the past, which included the creation of illuminated manuscript volumes and folios.\textsuperscript{380} Less focused on beauty and sensual pleasure, the Movement advocated simplicity and ‘truth to materials’ in promoting social regeneration through the embrace of the spirit of medieval art, design, literature and ideology.\textsuperscript{381} Waller brought a strong spiritual dimension to her personal engagement with Arts and Crafts values in the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Waller was among a number of book illustrators who found sympathetic parallels between the artistic and social values of the Movement and personal spiritual expression. As McFarlane has observed, many of the Socialist principles advanced by Morris and his circle were incorporated into the Theosophical Society, which shared a vision of social renewal.\textsuperscript{382} Proponents of the Movement looked nostalgically to cultures from the past in order to build a better society, and had messages that appealed to Theosophists who shunned the ideology of progress and the world of materialism in search of spiritual enlightenment.\textsuperscript{383} Art was a vehicle through which these messages could be shared. This connection is significant and goes some way to understanding Waller’s own unity of Arts and Crafts and spiritual values in her art.

This group of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century artists and writers, harnessed the revival of romantic medievalism, Classical myths and legends and immersed themselves in alternative spiritual enquiry. The English painter and illustrator Richard Dadd (1817–66) was one of these, and claimed that he had seen fairies and drawn inspiration from them for works such as his unfinished masterpiece

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure37.jpg}
\caption{Richard Dadd, The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke, 1855–64, oil on canvas, 54 x 39.4 cm, Tate Britain, London, England, acquired 1963.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{380} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{382} McFarlane, “Concerning the Spiritual in Melbourne: The Influence of the Theosophical Society on Some Melbourne Artists in the Early Modern Period,” p. 17.
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.
The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke (1855–64) [Figure 3]. The painting depicts a group of fairies in a forest, eagerly watching a huntsman attempt to split an acorn with one axe stroke. While scholars have cited Dadd’s mental instability and refuted the significance of his claims, his was not a unique experience. Many leading writers of the Victorian Age believed in fairies, including English critic John Ruskin (1819–1900), Scottish writers Andrew Lang (1844–1912) and Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94), whose books Waller owned. American architect and Anthroposophist Marion Mahony Griffin (1871–1961), who lived in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1910s, also believed in fairies. Waller who, as I have argued, identified with her Celtic roots, was a part of this group; she owned a first-edition copy of Lang’s seminal treatise Custom and Myth (1884), and placed one of her bookplates on the front endpapers, signalling its importance to her.

In view of the above discussion of the link between visual artists who explored mystical ideas in their practices, I argue that Waller’s fairy tale illustrations are informed by her sense of the spiritual. When considered alongside the personal developments in her life during the 1920s—a time when she created a domestic environment that espoused her Arts and Crafts values and was increasingly immersed in alternative spiritual practices—it becomes clear that her illustrations reflect a broader engagement with spiritual development. By the time she produced The Gates of Dawn in 1932, this influence was even more explicit in her art. Having introduced the art of book illustration and provided context on why this medium appealed to Waller, focus now turns to the examination of some of her early illustrations.

Waller as Illustrator: Myth and Symbolism in her Early Works

The harmony of word, image and message underscored Waller’s art practice. She engaged with texts throughout her period of activity. She did not, therefore, simply create book illustrations for commercial reasons, but rather because this form of

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387 Observed during a visit to the Waller House. I identified ownership of the books by observing Waller’s name on the front endpapers.
artistic expression aligned with her values whilst also allowing her to earn an income from her art.\footnote{388} The fact she exhibited some of her illustrations on several occasions indicates that she considered them to be as significant as the work she produced in other media, and that she sought to maximise exposure of them.\footnote{389} This is evidenced by the fact she produced a number of illustrations responding to spiritually-directed texts and myths that were exhibited in Melbourne from the mid-1910s through to the late 1920s.\footnote{390} Beginning in her student years, Waller used her art to engage with literary, spiritual and mythological themes that she had encountered in books.

Themes and narratives explored in her illustrations reflect the wide-ranging interests that informed her spiritual and artistic outlook. These included: Classical myths and legends, Biblical narratives, Pre-Raphaelitism, the Celtic Revival and the Romantic-cum-macabre mystery genre pioneered by American Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49). This is seen in the titles of works she exhibited through the Victorian Artists’ Society between 1913 and 1922, including: The Vale Asunder (1913) which references the tearing of the veil in the temple following the death of Jesus Christ; Illustration to ‘The Forest Lovers’ (1919), referencing Maurice Hewlett’s (1861–1923), classic 1898 French-medieval romance; and The Ancient Mariner (1919), inspired by Coleridge’s epic Romantic poem The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798).\footnote{391}

Waller leveraged the ideals of Pre-Raphaelitism to bridge literature and visual art to create symbolic illustrations during this early phase of her career. Art historian Alison Inglis has observed that the first generation of Pre-Raphaelites engaged with the medieval world through literature, meaning that Waller’s mode of \textit{entrée} was not unusual.\footnote{392} Pre-Raphaelitism, as discussed in Chapter One, was an art movement that flourished in England from 1848, and evolved in different directions through the work of an expanding circle of predominately male artists through to the end of the

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\footnote{388} I have been unable to find information regarding payments Waller received for her work as an illustrator.  
\footnote{389} In 1921 she exhibited her illustration for The Renegades through the Victorian Artists’ Society. In November 1925 she exhibited the illustrations to Australian Fairy Tales (1925) at the New Gallery, Melbourne. In April 1932 she exhibited her design for The Great Breath in the Exhibition of Linocuts at Everyman’s Lending Library, Melbourne.  
\footnote{390} See Appendix A for further information about artworks Waller exhibited.  
The first wave of the movement, led by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, spanned the years 1848–53, with subsequent generations of Pre-Raphaelites following on their heels during the second half of the nineteenth century. The influence was felt in Australia, particularly through Thomas Woolner and Bernhard Smith and the fanfare associated with the 1906 tour of William Holman Hunt’s (1827–1910) iconic painting *The Light of the World* (1851–53). Contrary to this established view, I argue that a generation emerged after 1900 that included Christian Waller and her husband, who produced art that responded to the values of the movement in Melbourne during the 1910s and 1920s. Analysis of her early illustrations within the context of Pre-Raphaelitism allows for a more nuanced understanding of the movement, one that captures more fully its geographic reach and time span and assists in analysing the spiritual symbolism she displayed in these early works.

In Waller’s earliest known surviving illustration, she embraced the values of Pre-Raphaelitism to produce a distinctive work that is indicative of the trajectory of her œuvre. *The Water of Lethe* [Figure 38] was produced for *Melba’s Gift Book of Australian Art and Literature* (1915), which consisted of a compilation of stories, poems and artworks, compiled on behalf of operatic soprano Dame Nellie Melba (1861–1931) to raise funds for the Belgian Relief Fund during the First World War. It does not appear that the content was commissioned, suggesting that Waller had already produced this illustration or that she decided on the theme with the publication in mind. The narrative and symbolism therefore reflect her spiritual and artistic interests at the time when she completed formal tuition.

*The Water of Lethe* combines Classical and medieval myths and legends with Pre-Raphaelite sensibilities. It does not respond to a specific piece of writing in the gift book, but rather draws on familiar symbols and myths to craft a symbolic narrative. Christian Waller’s illustration was inspired by the river Lethe (oblivion), one of the

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396 Art historian Juliette Peers did not include Waller and her husband when she briefly discussed the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on Australian artists after the First World War.
397 Profits from the sale of this book were donated by Melba to the Belgian Relief Fund. The book features works by a number of Australian artists including Norman Lindsay, George Lambert, Sydney Ure Smith, Lionel Lindsay, Fred C. McCubbin, Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, Charles Nuttall and Arthur Streeton. Works by various Australian writers are also featured, including Ethel Turner, Henry Lawson, Mrs Aeneas Gunn and Louis Esson.

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five rivers in the underworld in Ancient Greek mythology. Drinking from the waters of Lethe made humans forget their earthly existence, and was thus associated with reincarnation as the body was ready for the next life. References to Lethe peppered Victorian poetry, including works by John Keats (1795–1821) and Lord Byron (1788–1824). Melba acquired Waller’s illustration, which has since been donated to the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum in Victoria. The original illustration, [Figure 39], includes the title *The Water of Lethe* (which was cropped out when reproduced in the book).

The illustration is an early example of Waller’s personal engagement with symbolic spiritual expression. It depicts a youthful male figure perched against a rock beneath a laurel tree as he passes a cup to a young woman standing in front of him. He has been identified as the Classical god Apollo, who was the god of music, prophecy and healing. At the base of the rock sits a lyre and an open book—both symbols associated with Apollo—which are barely discernible amongst the dense foliage. Waller has given the narrative a Classical-cum-medieval feeling based on the

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inclusion of a flower crown Apollo wears (as opposed to a laurel crown, which is
normally associated with the god) and due to the use of intricate line work that is
reminiscent of medieval prints. He wears a rough piece of cloth wrapped around
him, suggestive of Classical robes. The woman stands side on to the viewer, and
wears an elongated dress and has long hair, which has been braided and rests over
her right shoulder. Her braided hairstyle has more in common with medieval
hairstyles than those of the Classical period, showing Waller’s preference for
medieval imagery. Her hesitant stance suggests she is nervous about drinking from
the cup, which contains water from the Lethe River, as it will cause her to forget
everything.

Waller’s individual use of symbolism is expressed in the mystical, dreamlike quality of
the illustration. The composition is encapsulated: the main narrative is oval in shape,
with a line marking it from traces of another square-shaped background that sits
behind the oval; traces of an outdoor domestic area are visible. This compositional
device makes the central image appear to be an illusion, whereas the traces of a
paved area and a garden—seen at the bottom left and right of the picture plane—
frame the image, indicating the reality that Apollo and the woman have escaped
from. Given that the illustration was almost certainly created specifically for a book
to raise funds for the war effort, Waller’s approach could be interpreted as suggesting
that engagement with myth and spirituality is a way of forgetting the horrors of war
and accessing a higher realm.

Around 1917 she produced illustrations for the seventh edition of the grade-three-
school reader Tales From Far and Near [Figure 40] that show an ongoing engagement
with Pre-Raphaelitism as well as an intersection between her private and
commissioned works.403 These illustrations have not been analysed or reproduced in
previous studies on Waller, nor have copies of the book been shown in exhibitions
about her work.404 The book incorporated abridged versions of predominately
European myths and historical events—such as the battle of Troy, the death of King

403 As the book is not dated, I have estimated its date as 1917 based on a newspaper advertisement.
404 Organ made a brief reference to this book in one of his journal articles.
Tales From Far and Near and My Cookery Book were not included in Butler’s catalogue raisonné of Waller’s prints, poster and illustrated books
included in the Art of Christian Waller catalogue as Waller’s involvement with them was not know at the time.
Arthur and the bravery of British Admiral Lord Nelson, written by unnamed authors. Waller produced eight illustrations and the cover art, each of which are in pen and ink that was then reproduced through lineblock printing. Their symbolism and visual expression have parallels with works Waller was producing as an independent artist during this time, such as the pen and ink drawing _Merlin and Nimue_ (1920) [Figure 2], which was inspired by an Arthurian narrative that was a popular subject for Pre-Raphaelites including Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98).\(^{405}\) It indicates that her personal interest informed her commissioned work. 

In _The Death of King Arthur_ [Figure 41], for example, Waller’s familiarity with Arthurian narratives is used to great effect to create a lyrical artwork. King Arthur lies in a sailboat at the point of death, flanked by three sorceresses attempting to heal him as three men hurriedly row the boat; presumably seeking to get King Arthur to the magical land of Avalon, which is purported to possess healing qualities.\(^{406}\) The intricate details of the clothing—particularly its ornament—and accessories demonstrate Waller’s familiarity with the time period. However, it is her depiction of the three sorceresses that firmly connects this work with her broader body of work. The women each wear crowns, symbols associated with immortality and resurrection, and they lay their hands on Arthur’s body, symbolising efforts to heal him. They wear flowing dresses, with two of the three figures clothed in heavily patterned dresses that incorporate Celtic-style ornamentation. Arthur’s long hair and body

seem to disappear in the intricate pattern of the dress worn by the woman whose lap his head rests on. It is the women, not the dying King, who dominate the picture, with this an early example of spiritual women in the artist’s œuvre, albeit in a context where she appears to have been constrained by the commission, evidenced by the minimal use of symbols in the illustrations.

Waller’s interest in the Celtic Revival also contributed to her attraction to illustration as a means to combine textual and visual symbolism. In March 1923, for example, she exhibited Illustration to Yeats’ ‘Shadowy Waters’ in Oils, Water-colours, Drawings, Etchings, and Woodcuts [Figure 42] at Melbourne’s Decoration Galleries.407 I have attributed this work as the watercolour sold at auction under the title as Mythological Scene.408 Shadowy Waters is an epic play by Yeats. Yeats, as will be discussed in the following chapter, was a key player in the Celtic Revival and was also an occultist, being a onetime member of the Irish Theosophical Society and a devotee of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.409 He described The Shadowy Waters as “magical and mystical beyond anything I have done”.410 Waller emphasised the mystical quality of the narrative and portrays a man and a woman riding a flying unicorn over a lake that is surrounded by a town. The couple wear Celtic medieval attire, discernible by the flowing brown cape worn by the man and the patterned bands around his sleeves, chest and waist, as well as the flowing white robe worn by the woman. The unicorn’s saddle is green with gold ornament, signalling a connection to Ireland and the symbolic importance of the colour green.411 Once again, the woman is shown as a spiritual figure as she holds a crystal ball in her right hand. A ship with a large yellow and red sail is visible in the distance at bottom left of the image.

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409 Kuch, Yeats and Æ, pp. 10–13, 57–58.
Illustration to Yeats’ ‘Shadowy Waters’ is one of a number of mystical illustrations that feature a magical being that Waller produced in the 1910s and 1920s. Her depiction of magical creatures in this and other works of art, demonstrates that her involvement with mysticism was more than mere fascination. This is reinforced through references to her beliefs made by her family and friends. Klytie Pate, reflecting on her adolescent years living with the Wallers, noted her aunt’s immersion in Irish tales. Waller encouraged her to select aspects from these stories and create illustrations to bring them to life. It is likely that Pate’s linocut Limpang Tung [Figure 43] was created through this process, as it depicts a character from one of Waller’s favourite Celtic Revival works, Lord Dunsany’s (1878–1957) *The Gods of Pegāna* (1905). In the 1930s, Waller also arranged for Pate to assist her friend Ola Cohn in carving the iconic *Fairies’ Tree* (1931–34) in Melbourne’s Fitzroy Gardens. Describing her aunt as being “so immersed in it all [myths and legends] that she could make it all come to life”, indicates the degree to which Waller’s personal and artistic interests overlapped.

Further little-known examples of Waller’s art prove her engagement with mysticism was more than an artistic pursuit. Two pen and ink sketches dated 1912 in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia and appear to be intended to accompany a story, which is suggested by the frame Waller has drawn around the illustrations and their intimate, landscape format. One bears the title *A Little While in Fairyland* [Figure 44] while the other untitled sketch depicts a girl in medieval clothing encountering what appears to be a female fairy or earth spirit in a forest [Figure 45].

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412 Pate, “Klytie Pate Interviewed by James Murdoch.”
413 Ibid.
414 Ibid.
In the latter the girl appears under the spell of the mystical woman. Waller employs curvilinear forms to create rhythm and movement in the illustration, once again reflecting the influence of Crane and other leading British illustrators. The fairy tale story is set in Australia, with Waller including eucalypt trees in the illustration, yet the fairy is drawn in a European style.

Waller also exhibited several illustrations to mystical, macabre stories by Poe, further demonstrating the breadth of her spiritual interests. These were shown in the Victorian Artists’ Society’s Annual Spring Exhibition in 1920 and included *Ligeia*, *A Dream Within a Dream* and *Closing Scene in the Fall of the House of Usher*, which has not survived.\(^{415}\) Poe engaged with various forms of alternative spiritual enquiry, particularly Mesmerism, which flourished in America at the same time as in Britain.\(^{416}\) Rather than seeing Mesmerism as a tool for spiritual growth, Poe considered that it revealed the feeble, depraved nature of humanity. His writings, including those

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\(^{415}\) Victorian Artists’ Society Annual Spring Exhibition, 6–19 September, V.A.S. Galleries, Eastern Hill, (East Melbourne, VIC: Victorian Artists’ Society 1920).

Waller responded to, are infused with this belief that runs counter to the core value of Theosophy and Spiritualism regarding the capacity to improve oneself through spiritual enquiry.  

Waller's involvement with Poe's literature reinforces the fact she was attuned to a wide range of ideas, not simply those advanced by the Theosophical Society.

While Waller's Poe works do not survive, another illustration from this period, *The Gateway to Nowhere* (1919) [Figure 46], also has a macabre, mystical quality. It portrays a man and a woman standing in a rocky landscape. The background is foreboding, save for the blossoming pink flowers in the lower section. They appear trapped in their environment, emphasised by their tense body language and gazes that suggests they are looking for a pathway out of their situation. The narrative suggests the futility of human endeavour, which is reinforced by the metaphor in its title. This work does not appear to be inspired by a particular narrative and instead draws together her interest in fantasy, mysticism and the macabre.

417 Ibid., p. 197.

418 It may have been through her interest in Poe's writing that Waller first became acquainted with the illustrator and stained-glass artist Harry Clarke, whose suite of twenty-four illustrations for Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* was published 1919. Clarke's influence on Waller's approach to illustration is examined in detail later in this chapter.

Waller achieved a similar quality in her illustration *Destiny* [Figure 47] that, in 1921, was reproduced alongside the poem of the same name by Alice Reeves in *Art and Letters: Hassell’s Australian Miscellany*, published by Vidler.\(^{419}\) This illustration appears to have been derived from a 1916 oil painting [Figure 33], although it is unclear if the illustration, poem or the painting came first (as the painting may be incorrectly dated). Waller’s imagery brings to life the sentiments of Reeves’ poem through its depiction of a witch-like woman breathing over a bubbling cauldron that has people trapped in bubbles floating on the surface of the mysterious brew. In this illustration—as with the painting—the woman has her eyes closed and her hair raised to the side forming sinuous waves that add a mood of foreboding drama to the work. This, like so many of Waller’s depictions of women, is not a flattering portrayal, but rather one that highlights the strength and power of the figure. In this way it recalls the so-called ‘Spook School’ of illustration and design advanced by the Glaswegian artists Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh (1864–1933) and Frances Macdonald (1873–1921). Their use of ghoulish female imagery can be seen in a poster [Figure 48] they designed for an umbrella factory.\(^{420}\) Like the Macdonald sisters before her, Waller presents polarised images of women: the powerful and somewhat sinister and, concurrently, the enlightened earth mother.

Her interest in producing illustrations and narrative-driven artworks is expressed through both her independent and commissioned works. Attention now moves to focus on Waller’s book illustrations and the ways on which she engaged with Arts and Crafts values in her capacity as a book illustrator.

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\(^{419}\) This publication also featured an illustration by Waller for Queen Rosamond as well as an article about the artist-author relationship between Waller and Atkinson.


The Architecture of the Book: Arts and Crafts Sensibilities in Waller’s Book Illustrations

As with her independent illustrations, in her book illustrations Waller drew together her artistic and spiritual values to create original artworks that explored mystical narratives. Her engagement with the ideals of Arts and Crafts modes of production is expressed throughout her book illustrations, as is her concern with symbolic expression. I argue that these two driving forces cannot be separated when appraising Waller’s art. This is because she drew on the ideological aspects of the Arts and Crafts Movement—namely social renewal through the applied and decorative arts—and combined this with a personal desire to use her art as a vehicle for communicating spiritual values, a desire also born from an objective to uplift society through the work of art.

In Waller’s book illustrations her commitment to producing art of the highest standard was upheld despite the fact that much of the work was commissioned for pre-existing texts. In this way, she espoused the principles advanced by figureheads of the Arts and Crafts Movement, John Ruskin, Morris and Crane when producing her illustrations: that is, they adhered to their claims for integrity in book design. In his 1893 lecture “The Ideal Book”, Morris argued that inappropriate decoration can ruin the beauty of a printed book: “the ornament must form part of the page as the type itself”. For Morris, illustrations and textual embellishments were only effective when they became “architectural”. Here and in other lectures and writings he reinforced the importance of producing illustrations that sympathetically enhanced the text and used an expression that reflected the themes and ideas of the text, yet did not dominate it.

Morris’ philosophies informed Waller’s approach to art and life, including her book illustrations. She owned several of his books of poetry, second editions of books published by his Kelmscott Press and theoretical texts; this included a book about Morris and his poetry that she was given by a friend for Christmas 1912, her earliest

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421 The Great Breath and The Gates of Dawn are the only published works that Waller both wrote and illustrated.
423 Ibid., p. 73.
known encounter with his work. In 1920 she exhibited When the Sword Came Back from the Sea ‘William Morris’ through the Victorian Artists’ Society. This work does not survive, however the title indicates that it was produced in response to Morris’ poem The Sailing of the Sword that was published in The Defence of Guinevere and Other Poems (1892), a lavishly-illustrated book published by the Kelmscott Press six years after his death.

Crane made a similar argument to Morris in his work Of the Decorative Illustration of Books (1896). His critical writings on the Arts and Crafts Movement provided some of the most influential views on illustration of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. His own extensive output of illustrations, the majority of which were produced for children’s books, bears witness to these views. Like Morris, Crane championed the integrity of illustration and repeatedly drew parallels between the art of illustration and architecture in his critical writings. Crane asserted that illustrations should be a homogenous aspect of the text, rather than an obtrusive feature: every part of the book—its text and illustrations—should give balance and harmony to the whole. This connection is interesting, given that Waller later devoted herself to the art of stained glass and promoted the importance of seeing windows as part of an architectural whole, rather than considering them as independent artworks. Her Arts and Crafts attitude can thus be witnessed in her approach to illustration and, later, to stained glass.

Crane also asserted that a key role of illustration was to illuminate fanciful subject matter. Indeed, interest in folklore and fairy tales in Great Britain, Ireland and Australia in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was fuelled by the Arts and Crafts Movement. Such a view is pertinent when considering Waller’s illustrations, given that they almost exclusively express fanciful and mystical ideas. In the opening pages in Of the Decorative Illustration of Books, Crane proclaimed:

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424 Waller also owned a 1913 edition of Morris’ collected prose and poetry (1856–70) amongst other works, and placed her bookplate on the inner cover, indicating that it had special importance for the artist.
425 The whereabouts of this work is not known.
Victorian Artists’ Society Annual Spring Exhibition, 6–19 September, V.A.S. Galleries, Eastern Hill, unpaginated.
428 See: ibid.
If painting is the looking-glass of nations and periods, pictured books may be called the handglass which still more intimately reflects the life of different centuries and peoples, in all their minute and homely detail and quaint domesticity, as well as their playful fancies, their dreams and aspirations. In this statement Crane acknowledges that illustrations can reflect the everyday lives of their audiences, whilst also emphasising the role they can play in stimulating the imaginative faculty. Later in the book he argued that children’s book illustrations are the most effective type of illustration in this regard:

they are attractive to designers of an imaginative tendency, for in a sober and matter-of-fact age they afford perhaps the only outlet for unrestricted flights of fancy open to the modern illustrator, who likes to revolt against the despotism of facts.

Here Crane connects fairy tale illustration with a rejection of material truths, a rejection that ran through Waller’s œuvre.

Waller responded to Crane’s values—and those of the Arts and Crafts Movement more generally—through her designs for *Australian Fairy Tales* (1925) by the patriotic politician turned author Hume Cook (1866–1942), and other works. In several of the books Waller illustrated, she designed decorative motifs to embellish pages, as well as detailed illustrations that depict specific events in the stories. The title page of *Australian Fairy Tales* [Figure 49], with its intricate line work and decorated letters, is an example of this influence. Waller’s illustration here is decidedly less ‘ornate’ than that of Crane’s title page for *Household Stories from the Collection of the Bros. Grimm*, translated by Lucy Crane, published by Dover, New York [Figure 50].

431 Ibid., p. 158.
This reflects, on the one hand, changes of aesthetic taste over the thirty-year period that separates the two works and, on the other, the individual aesthetic of each artist. Rather than mimicking the style of these popular illustrators, whose influence continued into the 1920s, Waller drew on these influences to craft her own singular artworks.

The illustrations for *Australian Fairy Tales* bring together the themes of fairyland and the natural Australian environment. Waller, in following the text, drew on the British and European legacy of fairy tale illustration. She combined this with distinctly Australian references to evoke a vision of Australian fairyland, as Cook’s narrative suggests. This combination of influences is seen in an illustration [Figure 51] depicting Desert Fairies and the Princess surrounded by native flora, specifically Sturt’s Desert Pea. They resemble traditional British and European representations of fairy-tale characters, however the Fairies’ hair looks like the flowers, linking them to the environment. Having established the Arts and Crafts foundation to Waller’s book illustrations, I will now examine the way in which Waller engaged with the Australian discourse of fairy tale illustration.

![Figure 51: "They suddenly rushed from their hiding places and started pushing and dragging her over the sandy desert", 1925, from: Australian Fairy Tales, by Hume Cook, Melbourne: J. Howlett-Ross](image)

**Fairies in the Outback: Waller and Australian Fairy-Tale Illustration**

This chapter has so far introduced Waller’s illustrations into the broader discussion of her art and life, in particular the way in which she synthesised her aesthetic and
spiritual values to create art with a message. It is beyond mere coincidence that the vast majority of the publications to which she contributed illustrations explored mystical and supernatural ideas. Although much of Waller’s art explored themes that ran counter to popular currents of early-twentieth-century art in Australia, there was a local and an international community of artists who shared her interests as part of a widespread cultural phenomenon of alternative spiritual enquiry.

Australian fascination with fairies emerged from the phenomenon in Victorian England. Literary scholar Carole G. Silver argued that this fascination was expressed chiefly through the arts, including illustration. The countless fairy paintings, stories, photographs and illustrations produced in the Victorian era were, Silver contended, “attempts to reconnect the actual and the occult”. 432 This connection was endorsed by leading occult figures, including Blavatsky, who, in *Isis Unveiled* (1877), asserted the existence and merits of elemental spirits, describing them as “the producers of all the phenomena except the subjective”. 433 Silver cited the Celtic influences in the British Isles—particularly in Cornwall—that were undergoing a revival in the nineteenth century, as major contributing factors to the Victorian fascination with fairies. 434

It is clear that, Victorian interest in fairies and the alternative spirituality intersected and, moreover, had ties to the Celtic Revival. This Revival was a movement that significantly influenced Waller’s art and life; as is discussed in the following chapter. Additionally, the role the arts played in expressing and extending the reach of the Victorian fascination with fairies provides partial explanation of fairy imagery in the work she produced during the 1920s. As such, consideration of the Victorian fascination with fairies offers insight into Waller’s fairy illustrations and the occult ideas to which they respond.

A recent exhibition, *Looking for Faeries* (2010), at the Bendigo Art Gallery in Victoria explored the fascination with fairyland in the Victorian era and its subsequent manifestation in Australia and New Zealand. Waller’s prints *The Sorceress* (1922) and

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434 Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness*, p. 34.
The Woman of Faery (1932), along with the original lithographic manuscript of The Gates of Dawn (1932) were included in the exhibition.⁴³⁵ Curator Anna Clabburn, in her catalogue essay, delineated the ways in which the British ‘golden age’ of fairy painting, 1840–1870, was embraced by Australian artists from the 1850s.⁴³⁶ This influence was felt across the visual arts, from photography and painting to illustration, and continued into the first decades of the twentieth century. As an artist undertaking formal tuition in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Waller was exposed to this influence by virtue of her training and geographic proximity to the centre of fairy fascination in Australia: Melbourne and the Victorian goldfields.

The trope regarding the mystic nature of the Australian landscape permeates Waller’s illustrations for Australian Fairy Tales, The Adventurous Elves: An Authoritative Fairy Story (1926) by May Lillian Paten and The Mad Painter and Other Bush Sketches (1926) by Janie M. Stevens. Her illustrations emphasise the mysterious nature of the Australian bush that is alluded to in the stories. She links the spiritual potency of the landscape with powerful feminine symbols that demonstrate her personal philosophy regarding the role of spiritual women.

In The Arrival of the Shower Fairies [Figure 52], a watercolour reproduced in Australian Fairy Tales, the Shower Fairies emerge out of a rainbow following a desert rainstorm. They occupy the right-hand side of the illustration, with seven fairies who look almost identical. Wearing sheer pink dresses with a patterned bodice and long flowing blond hair, the wingless fairies descend towards the Desert Fairies who huddle together on the sand to left of the image, appearing anxious about their arrival. Waller incorporated Australian references—such as the hair of the Desert Fairies that is a similar colour to the earth in the Australian desert and to some plants —and used native imagery to decorative effect. The text reproduced below the illustration assists in analysing the image: “the Shower Fairies arrived, and, with their pellet-like raindrops beat the sand particles down”.⁴³⁷ Rather than emphasising the “pellet-like raindrops”, Waller has chosen to show them emerging with force from a rainbow, a symbol of spiritual awakening.

⁴³⁵ See Appendix A for additional information about this exhibition.
⁴³⁶ Anna Clabburn, Looking for Faeries: The Victorian Tradition (Bendigo: Bendigo Art Gallery, 2010), unpaginated.
⁴³⁷ Organ has also noted that the book engages with the British tradition of fairy tales in an Australian context. He also acknowledged the strength of Waller’s illustrations.

Elsewhere in *Australian Fairy Tales* Waller depicted the fairies and women in the story as powerful figures. Their image is aligned with the natural environment and they appear as spiritual healers. This links the illustrations to other depictions of powerful women in her work. This is apparent in the illustration produced to accompany Cook’s poem *Children of the Moon* [Figure 53]. In the illustration Waller depicts the Moon Mother surrounded by her “Children of the Sky”. Compositionally, Waller has created an inverted pyramid with the lines of perspective merging on the Moon Mother, who sits wearing a crown and flowing Classical-style robes. The image is dominated by the Moon, who wears a lunar crown and is shown seated surrounded by her children who appear in deep devotion. The girl on the far right of the image, who wears a robe embellished with flowers, is illustrative of this. She stands with her head bowed, her gaze fixed on a long chain around her neck, the end of which she holds in her hands, in a manner similar to the Catholic practice of holding rosary beads in a moment of prayer. In front of the devout figure is another ‘child’, who is kneeling before the Moon Mother in a manner also similar to that of Christian religious worship. The night sky dotted with stars occupies the upper half of the picture, another of Waller’s spiritual symbols that, as discussed in Chapter Seven, she drew on to express her spiritual values. The inclusion of these symbols indicates that, although commissioned works responding to the author’s narrative, Waller consciously used the platform of book illustration to express her personal values.

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438 Ibid., p. 121.
Waller’s pen and ink illustrations for *The Adventurous Elves*, clearly connect fairyland to the Australian bush. The elves and fairies appear overshadowed by the scale of the landscape, and are not the focal point of the images. This is seen in “Father Jack closed one eye” [Figure 54], which depicts two kookaburras perched on the branch of a gumtree, with the three elves—Chit, Chat and Chut—standing at a tree trunk in the bottom left hand side of the image. Although featuring the mystical elves, Waller did not choose to focus on them, or to exploit the curious characteristics of the kookaburras (who, in the story, can talk). Instead, the elves and kookaburras blend into the Australian landscape, suggesting that they are not out of place.

Also drawing on Australian bush mythology, author May Lillian Paten’s story features a lost five-year-old girl named Ariel who, being a child, can see the elves.439 “Ariel crossed the log bridge” [Figure 55] brings to life the scene of Ariel coming across the elves in their outback hideaway. Here Waller emphasised the elves’ connection to the landscape by depicting them camouflaged by the natural flora and fauna. In the image it is Ariel (dressed in the fashion of the 1920s), not the elves, who seems out of place. Waller employed similar sweeping line work to create the elves’ costumes as she does the grasses and plants. As in “Father Jack closed one eye”, the inclusion of a gum tree and other native Australian plants firmly locates the scene in Australia.

439 The name Ariel has a long association with mysticism and the occult. In Shakespeare’s iconic play *The Tempest* (c. 1610–1611), the name Ariel is given to an androgynous spirit who serves the play’s protagonist, the magician Prospero. Ayto, Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, s. v. “Ariel,” p. 63.
Waller’s illustrations for *The Mad Painter*, one of the stories in *The Mad Painter and Other Bush Sketches*, demonstrate her increased confidence in referencing native plants to create mystical narratives. On the frontispiece [Figure 56], for example, Waller celebrated the awesome nature of the Australian bush by depicting the trunks of large gum trees in the foreground, surrounded by sinuous plants growing out of a rocky ground. In the centre the protagonist Galt, can be seen from behind standing on the edge of a rocky outcrop saluting the rising sun in the distance. The line from the book printed beneath the illustration reinforces the spiritual nature of the image: “His god of colour was rising from the sea”. In the story Galt decides to watch the sunrise over the Pacific, lamenting that “something chilled his soul” between sunset and sunrise, causing him to forget the beauty of the natural world.\footnote{J. M. Stevens, *The Mad Painter and Other Bush Sketches*, (Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler, 1926), p. 16.} Here Waller’s rendering of the rising sun, the stream of birds and natural forms has parallels with her deployment of these symbols in later artworks, such as her prints and stained-glass windows. This fact further demonstrates how she crystallised her symbolic visual expression through book illustration.

![Figure 56: Frontispiece, 1926, from: *The Mad Painter and Other Bush Sketches*, by Janie M. Stevens, Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler](image1)

![Figure 57: “We dance to make the flowers grow”, from: *The Mad Painter and Other Bush Sketches*, by Janie M. Stevens, Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler](image2)

The appearance of female fairies in an illustration from *The Mad Painter* [Figure 57] is another example of Waller drawing on powerful female imagery and her favoured symbols to create mystical images. Reproduced above the line “we dance to make the flowers grow”, it depicts a fairy scene that Galt recounts to a girl he meets in the bush. He tells the girl that fairies have informed him how they dance on flower buds to encourage them to blossom, and that sometimes they actually damage the flowers causing parts to break off, and these broken bits of flowers form into colourful
butterflies. The illustration shows blooming flowers in the bottom third, with native Australian Correa on the left, and to the right a cluster of fairies and butterflies emerge from the flowers. The flowers, fairies and butterflies appear as interconnected symbols associated with mysticism, each bearing strong feminine characteristics.

Waller’s depiction of feminine magical beings in her book illustrations indicates the growing significance of what Butler has termed “women of power” in Waller’s art. What is important to note here is the fact that this dominant theme which appears in her illustrations strengthens the argument that these artworks occupy an integral position within her œuvre. Primary sources that I bring into scholarship on Waller support this view. Her interest in mystical creatures was cited by her friend John ‘Jack’ Tallis (1911–96) in the diary he kept whilst travelling on the Otranto to London in 1929.

Christian and Napier Waller were also on the ship and befriended the young composer, as he wrote:

Have had very interesting talks with Mrs Waller and Mr Waller, the artists… for some reason she [Christian Waller] has taken quite a liking to me—quite unusual! And has told me quite a lot of her secrets—about her work.

The diary, which was illustrated by Christian Waller, features images of a witch, a fairy, and a spiritual woman amongst other mythical creatures. It also includes a portrait of Tallis and the Wallers. Given that this was intended for personal viewing by Tallis, and not produced to illustrate a published book, the inclusion of this type of fantastic imagery adds further weight to the argument that Waller’s interest in fairies and other magical beings crossed her professional and personal interests.

442 Tallis was the son of influential theatre proprietor Sir George Tallis (1869–1948). Then seventeen, he was travelling to Europe with his mother and sister.
443 The professional collaboration and friendship between Christian Waller and Hart is discussed in Chapter Four.
Tallis’ observations about Waller, together with her illustrations, offer valuable insight into her interest in illustrations that express spiritual ideas. In one entry Tallis recounted an occasion when Waller asked a priest on the ship if he believed in fairies:

The other one [of the illustrations] was drawn because she spoke to a priest and asked him if he believed in fairies—‘Of course not.’—he said—so he is pictured pushing all things beautiful, from him—just like a priest would do!  

The illustration [Figure 60] is a caricature that mocks the priest, showing him shirking in a state of fear at Waller’s query. Tallis’ comments, viewed in relation to Waller’s illustration, imply that Waller did not think favourably of those who did not believe in fairies. The use of the word ‘beautiful’ is poignant here as Waller has drawn the priest as a stereotypically ugly and weak man whereas her illustrations of a fairy located on the previous page demonstrate beauty.

Waller’s fairy tale illustrations of the 1920s are part of the revival of interest in fairy tales that dates back to Victorian England and nineteenth-century Australia. Between 1830 and 1900 children’s fairy tales reached their peak of popularity. This coincided with belief in the existence of fairies by a number of people of all classes who engaged with mysticism and alternative spiritual philosophies as a

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means of escaping the pressures of modernity and coming to terms with the rise of scientific and Darwinian reason.\textsuperscript{446} The arts—including visual art, drama, music, ballet, opera and literature—were all platforms through which this revival was explored.\textsuperscript{447} It provides a context for Waller’s response to fairies and fairy tales. Given the times in which she lived and the influences of late-Victorian art and ideas on her work, it is reasonable to assume that she believed in the existence of fairies. Her fairy illustrations are, therefore, part of her contribution to the discourse of spiritual art.

Fascination with fairies extended into the early-twentieth century in Australia and Britain. It increased after the horrors of the First World War, when many people sought refuge from the grim reality of modern times. The British Cottingley fairy hoax of 1917 exemplified the cultural fascination with fairies at that time, which was at its peak.\textsuperscript{448} The Theosophical Society advocated the existence of fairies, and used the Cottingley photographs as proof. Indeed eminent British writer and Spiritualist, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), not only championed the verity of these images, but also wrote extensively on the subject of fairies in works such as \textit{The Coming of Fairies} (1922).\textsuperscript{449} This is an example of the interest in fairies and other magical beings that was fostered by alternative spiritual philosophies, including Theosophy at the time when Waller was exploring these ideas through her art practice.

As previously discussed, nineteenth-century British occultism influenced engagement with arcane spiritual practices in Australia from the 1850s through to the 1930s. For many, this stimulated a search for alternative knowledge that combined elements of science with spiritual enquiry. The Theosophical Society, as mentioned in Chapter One, was born from this process when Blavatsky founded it in New York City in 1875. A number of artists, musicians and writers were engaged with this phenomenon. Through their creative endeavours, they alleged they had the potential to explore and bring to life beliefs (what Theosophists referred to as ‘truths’) that,
they believed, were not visible to the unenlightened. As discussed in the previous chapter, British migrants who had come to make their fortune in gold from the 1850s introduced these alternative beliefs to Australia. This influence was first felt on the Victorian goldfields, and soon spread through the region (including Castlemaine and Bendigo, where Waller was raised), and other parts of Australia. Interest in spiritualism and alternative spirituality reached a peak of influence at the time of Waller’s birth in the 1890s, with fairy-tale illustrations produced from the 1890s through to the 1930s.

Waller’s interest in fairy tale illustration was shared by other Australian artists in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Artists including May Gibbs (1877—1969) produced some of the finest works in the medium of illustration. Scholar Robert Holden, in his book on Australian fantasy illustration, argued that “the enduring masterpieces of Australia children’s book illustration are fantasy works”. He singled out the work of Melbourne illustrator Ida Rentoul Outhwaite (1888–1960)—best known for the deluxe publication *Elves and Fairies* (1916)—as having spearheaded Australian interest in fantasy illustration. He goes on to argue that Outhwaite was establishing an “alternative fraternity” of illustration in Melbourne that he calls the “Elves and Fairies School”. Holden included Waller in this group, which also featured Edith Alsop (1871–1958), Ethel Jackson Morris (1891–1985), and Harold Gaze (1885–1962), amongst others. This fraternity is characterised by an interest in producing illustrations of fairies which have loose associations to the Australian environment, seen in the cover illustration of Gaze’s *The Billibonga Bird* (1919) [Figure 61]. Aside from a distinctive cluster of Australia’s national flower Golden Wattle, the mystical scene does not appear to have a strong connection to the Australian landscape.
Where Waller’s exploration of fairyland differs from that of her Australian contemporaries is the degree to which she was immersed in alternative spiritual enquiry. For Waller—unlike Outhwaite and Gibbs, for example—her interest in fairies was not simply a professional curiosity that reflected the ideals of her age and was aimed to produce charming images to accompany books for the young. Rather, it was a reflection of her belief in an alternative reality and desire to communicate its merits and ways in which it could be accessed through her art. This reached its apogée with the creation of the children’s book *The Gates of Dawn* in 1932 that, although not featuring fairies, is steeped in the mystical tradition of fantastic and fairy tale narratives with similar illustrations.

**Parallel Spiritual Interests: Waller and Her Authors**

The majority of the texts Waller illustrated were penned by writers who shared her interest in mysticism and alternative spiritual philosophies. This explains why Waller generally undertook commissions to illustrate books in which the narratives aligned, to a greater or lesser extent, with her personal interests and values. In this way her illustrations represent an important dimension of her spiritually-directed practice. As with her stained glass, my research reveals that Waller largely accepted commissions where she could communicate a message through her art.455

In 1924 Waller became the first Australian to illustrate for *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) when she produced a suite of illustrations for an adaptation of this

455 See: Westhoven, “She Copes with a Five Year Queue...” p. 2.

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story published as *Alice in Wonderland* in the form of a school reader adapted by New Zealand writer A. E. Stewart.\(^{456}\) Originally written by mathematician, clergyman and amateur photographer Charles Dodgson (1832–98) under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, the tale of a young girl who mysteriously travels to an alternative reality is one of the most distinguished fairy tales that emerged from the Victorian period.

Arcane spiritual influences underscore *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. These reflect Dodgson’s sense of the spiritual as he became increasingly disillusioned with orthodox Christianity and flirted with Spiritualism, Theosophy and other forms of alternative spiritual enquiry.\(^{457}\) Throughout the book and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), Dodgson explored relationships between time and space, Numerology, thought-transference and the gematria. Each of these was promoted by the Theosophical Society as a means through which cosmological truths, imperceptible on the material plane, could be revealed.\(^{458}\) Waller’s interest in Numerology, amongst other things, was, in all likelihood, something that emerged from her association with Theosophy and was furthered through her engagement with the Golden Dawn. Viewed in this way, Dodgson’s experience of modernity resembled Waller’s, with his imaginative story that blended occultism and mysticism with the archetypes of children’s fairy tales. It was a genre Waller embraced when she wrote and illustrated *The Gates of Dawn*.

Given that Spiritualists and Theosophists held the view that truth or the ‘real world’ lay on a different plane of existence from that of the material world (sometimes referred to as the fourth dimension), Dodgson’s narrative can be viewed as an explication of this alternative reality which, followers of these philosophies considered to be more ‘truthful’ world than the one generally perceived. The Land of Oz from L. Frank Baum’s (1856–1919) American classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) is a similar alternative reality.\(^{459}\) Waller’s *The Gates of Dawn*, like these stories, is set in a mystical land that resembles a distorted version of Earth, with talking animals and witches.

\(^{456}\) See: E.A. Stewart, *Alice in Wonderland: Adapted from the Story by Lewis Carroll* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1924).


Waller’s pen and ink illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland* exemplify the way in which she expressed her personal beliefs through art, including commissioned work. They tease out the combination of natural and fantastic elements of Dodgson’s text and reflect the approach she took two years later when illustrating *The Adventurous Elves*. Her illustrations bring to life Dodgson’s fantastical characters: the Dodo, the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter and the Mock Turtle. Using Pate (who was twelve at the time) as the model for the young Alice, Waller’s illustrations have a more modern character than those of Sir John Tenniel (1820–1914), who produced the original and best-known illustrations to the story. Comparison between the representations of the story’s protagonist highlights this contrast. While Tenniel’s Alice wears Victorian clothing—a dress with puffed sleeves and a full skirt—Waller’s Alice sports a waistless, straight shift dress with a long beaded necklace and three-quarter length leggings, embodying the fashion of the 1920s. Waller thus brings the story into the contemporary world whilst retaining links to mysticism. This signalled how, in her view, these two worlds coexisted.

Waller’s illustrations bring to life the curious natural landscape of Wonderland, including its flora and fauna. This is seen in “*Her eyes immediately met those of the large Blue Caterpillar*” [Figure 62]. Waller emphasised the oversized mushrooms and thick grass around Alice, with the caterpillar playing a minor role in the image, located in the top left-hand corner. In Tenniel’s illustration of the Blue Caterpillar [Figure 63], the caterpillar dominates the image, rendered in a characteristic style that is seen throughout his suite of images: Alice and the landscape are given less of a focus.

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460 Thomas and Jordan, “Chronology,” p. 20; Organ, “Pre-Raphaelite Wonderland: Christian Yandell’s Alice,” p. 188.
Here Waller has created illustrations based on her own interpretation of the text; she puts forward the natural, as opposed to mimicking Tenniel’s fantastical images. Her vision of the mystical narrative reveals much about the way in which she combined her interest in mystical ideas with her respect for the natural environment, something she gained though her embrace of the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

These illustrations are an exception in Waller’s career as an illustrator which otherwise consists of works produced for original stories, the vast majority of which were published by Vidler. Although the Melbourne-based publisher played a significant role in solidifying and advancing Waller’s career as an illustrator, the relationship between the publisher and artist has, until now, not been fully fleshed out. He and Waller shared artistic interest in mystical tales, nature and the harmony of word and image, as well as spiritual interests in Theosophy and beliefs in the potential of the arts in to advance spiritual awareness.

English-born Vidler was a prominent figure in the Melbourne art scene in the 1920s and 1930s and was keen to progress Australian ‘culture’. At that time, many Australians still considered England as the motherland, and looked towards that country and to Europe and North America for cultural guidance. In an attempt to redress this, in August 1921 Vidler established The Australian Institute of the Arts and Literature, an organisation that aimed to promote and foster the arts.⁴⁶¹ He modelled it on the American Institute, which had proved effective in supporting the arts in America. The Institute was divided into three sectional committees that represented a different branch of the arts: Art and Art-Crafts, Music and Drama, and Literature. In a pamphlet produced by the Institute at the time of its inception, its aims were outlined. Chiefly, they were “the protection and furtherance of the arts and literature”, in order to establish public support and to create “a cultured atmosphere” of professionals and amateurs that would foster the arts in Australia.⁴⁶² Vidler’s utopian aims for the Institute reflect his desire to create a community of those involved with the arts to advance Australian culture that, in his view, was lacking in terms of depth and character.

Key individuals associated with the Australian Institute of the Arts and Literature shared Waller’s arcane interests. Her friend and collaborator Fritz Hart served as a Vice President, as did Bernard O’Dowd (1866–1953). Like Waller, both Hart and O’Dowd, were influenced by the Celtic Revival, in particular its occult dimension. Waller was associated with these figures who sought to promote Australian culture through the arts, and, at the same time, explored alternative spirituality. As such, the publications by Vidler, for which Waller produced illustrations, take on another meaning that is strongly tied to Waller’s participation in the discourse of spiritual art and art that addresses the sacred.

Vidler consistently published works that promoted Australian narratives and alternative spiritual enquiry. For such publications, Waller was his preferred illustrator. Vidler’s objectives, I argue, were to civilise Australians by drawing attention to the possibilities of individual and social development offered by the alternative spiritual practices. Hints of this are seen in Vidler’s 1928 article, “Are We Barbarians?”, published in the Australian Theosophical journal Advance Australia. In the article, Vidler advocated the potential for Australians with European heritage to contribute towards global intellectual progress through the arts:

Australia, with its virile nation drawn from the ancient civilisations of Europe, and especially from Great Britain, fostered under favourable conditions of climate and environment, need have no fear of lagging far behind in the forward intellectual movements of the present age—it has already taken its place among the nations of the world as a nursery of many of the arts.463

While Vidler’s argument that Anglo-European Australians are poised to contribute to the broader progress of humanity reflects the then contemporary attitudes to race, it also reflects Theosophical attitudes towards Australia and the arts.

Scholar of Theosophy in Australia, Jill Roe, claimed that Australia was viewed by the Theosophical Society as the place where the next race to materialize from evolution would emerge.464 The movement Roe labels “To Theosophise Australia” saw the publication of journals, pamphlets and books that aimed to educate Australians


about Theosophy and, by extension, civilise them.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 196–200.} The objectives of this movement have parallels with Vidler’s Australian Institute for the Arts and Literature. Given that this society emerged at a time when, after World War One, Australians were increasingly trying to reconcile the divide between religion and science and to establish their unique national culture, these parallels indicate that this Theosophical quest may have influenced Vidler’s decision to establish the Institute. The fact he was a member of the Theosophical Society and published an article in its journal \textit{Advance Australia} adds weight to this argument.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which Waller shared Vidler's views on advancing the arts in Australia per se, as she appears to have engagement with humanity as a whole. What is clear, however, is that the two shared an interest in spirituality which crossed over into their personal lives and had a strong presence in their professional lives: Vidler through the works he published, and Waller through her illustrations, prints and stained glass. When writing about her illustrations for \textit{The Renegades} (1921), he praised her ‘virile imagination’ and added:

\begin{quote}
They are strikingly original in conception, full of little touches of cynicism, and although highly decorative, they are yet realistic in their cynicism, full of life and movement, imbued with the pagan spirit of the poem they illustrate, yet noteworthy for an incorruptible refinement.\footnote{Vidler, \textit{Art and Letters: Hassell’s Australian Miscellany}, pp. 45–48.}
\end{quote}

Here he drew attention to Waller’s ability to capture the subversive yet decadent themes of the story, which features characters that indulge in vices and end up living in misery. This statement shows an accord between author, illustrator and publisher and demonstrates that he valued Waller’s ability to create illustrations that communicated the spiritual concepts of the works he published.

\textit{The Renegades} was written by Evelyn John ‘E. J.’ Rupert Atkinson (1881–1961), who showed an interest in arcane and mystical ideas. Also associated with the Vidler’s Institute, Atkinson was a noted poet of the early-twentieth century, with particular prominence in Victoria. He was known for his macabre, psychological plays, short stories and poetry.\footnote{“Atkinson, Evelyn John Rupert (1881–1961).”} Waller illustrated two of Atkinson’s verse stories \textit{The Renegades} and the unpublished \textit{Queen Rosamond} (1922), both of which centre on the myth of the Monk and the Courtesan, in which the two figures swap identities upon the Monk’s
request, seeking to convert the Courtesan. What results is that the Courtesan adopts the values of the Monk, however the Monk unexpectedly embraces the Courtesan’s life of vice. These are by far Waller’s strongest illustrations, save those produced for *The Gates of Dawn*.

The strength of Waller’s illustrations for *The Renegades* lies in her command of negative space, pattern and ornament to craft symbolic yet balanced work. In “*He chuckled: ‘Yes; when I want her I’ll call, / And she’ll return then. Guard her well for me’*”; [Figure 64] a nun is shown dressing a naked woman, while a man wearing an embellished coat looks to her in disdain and appears poised to exit the scene. An elaborate candelabrum occupies a central position in the background, and features ghoulish human faces at the base of each of the seven lit candles. The body of the naked woman is identifiable through subtle black dots used to delineate her features. Waller has effectively used symbolism to signal the struggle between good and evil. The candles on the left have burnt considerably as they are smaller than those on the right, are covered in molten wax and are producing sinuous streams of smoke. Those on the right, by contrast, are tall and no wax is dripping from them. They also illuminate the space without producing smoke. Essentially the left hand side of the image is full of vice, emphasised by the depiction of grapes on the man’s cloak, symbols associated with Bacchus, the Greek God of wine, whereas the right hand side represent purity, seen in the pale white skin of the young woman and the presence of a nun.

*Figure 64: “He chuckled: ‘Yes; when I want her I’ll call, / And she’ll return then. Guard her well for me’”,* 1921, pen and ink, from: *The Renegades*, by E. J. Rupert Atkinson, Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler

*Figure 65: Proof for ‘Queen Rosamond’ [Plate 9], 1922, relief lineblock, printed in black ink, from one block, Impression: printer’s proof, print run unknown, printed image 15.1 x 11.1 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, gift of Roger Butler, 2010*
A similar command of negative space and symbolism in pen and ink characterises Waller’s illustrations for *Queen Rosamond*. In *Proof for ‘Queen Rosamond’* [Plate 9] [Figure 65] she demonstrated an even greater command of the medium than in *The Renegades*. The intricate work is dominated by black ink that represents the darkness of night, with intricate white sections depicting a man undressing a woman, both wearing medieval attire, near an unmade bed and a table spilling over with luxuries, such as fine fabrics and grapes, with a Grecian urn in front of it. The scene is illuminated by a stained-glass window in the upper right, a compositional device that brings more white into the image to balance the composition. It creates a strong diagonal line from the table to the window.

![Figure 66: The Conspirators, 1921, pen and ink on paper, 12.7 x 25.9 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1979](image)

The illustration has compositional synergies with pen and ink ’drawing *The Conspirators* (1921) [Figure 66], which also depicts two figures in a darkened space that is illuminated by a stained-glass window. Here Waller utilised intricate line work to evoke a sinister scene that has little resemblance to the world in which she lived, suggesting instead a narrative from a medieval story, such as the legends of King Arthur, which had a pervasive influence on her art. Two cloaked figures meet within the stony walls of a castle; a stained-glass window is in the background. This work, like many of her illustrations, highlights her attraction to narratives that evoked an imaginary world—filled with both gentle fairies and sinister beings—far removed from the reality of life in Melbourne in the early-twentieth century. The strength of her artistic responses to Atkinson’s stories lies in the fact she was able to delve deeper into myth and symbolism due to the mystical, macabre qualities of the texts, as opposed to the more conventional books she illustrated.
Another example is the dust jacket she designed for the first edition of Erle Cox’s (1873–1950) pioneering Australian science fiction novel *Out of the Silence: A Romance* [Figure 67], that was first published by Vidler in 1925. The novel tells the story of a man living in rural Australia who discovers the remnants of a past civilisation beneath his land. In her illustration—that appears to have been executed in watercolour and then reproduced—Waller combines references to Classicism and clairvoyance with the science fiction elements in the novel. The back of a man is visible in the lower right-hand corner looking into a fantastical scene in a palatial home that he seems unable to enter. In the centre is a Classical-style marble sculpture that appears animate, and is surrounded by two columns, to the left there is a glowing ball—like a crystal ball—suspended on a stand, while on the right a woman is shown sleeping in a bedroom of the main room, encased in a clear bubble. The style of this work demonstrates Waller’s capacity to produce illustrations that harmonise with text, which in this case engaged with supernatural themes yet were set in the present day, as opposed to the macabre, mythological qualities of Atkinson’s stories.

![Figure 67: Dust Jacket Design for "Out of the Silence" (detail), colour printed letterpress from process blocks on thin wove paper, 19.8 x 50.8 cm, book written by Erle Cox, Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, gift of Roger Butler, 2010](image)

**International Exposure: The Influence of Art Journals and Magazines on Waller’s Approach to Illustration**

Waller combined a range of aesthetic influences to craft original book illustrations. These influences went beyond simply responding to narrative themes of the works she illustrated, and expressed her spiritual beliefs and interests. Previous scholarship

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468 The story was originally published in a serialised format in the Argus, between 19 April and 25 October 1919.

has focussed on the stylistic features of these illustrations and has drawn attention to
their Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Vienna Secession tendencies. Considered analysis, however, has not been given to the relationship between the aesthetic qualities of Waller’s illustration and their mystical themes. This previously unexplored connection offers significant insight into her work as it reveals that she was consciously marrying her art with her spiritual interests prior to the creation of the printed books *The Great Breath* and *The Gates of Dawn* in 1932.

From her student years Waller had access to reproductions of international artists' work whose art shared her aesthetic values. Art journals, which featured reproductions of artworks, played an important role in disseminating examples of illustrations by artists of various branches of the Arts and Crafts, Vienna Secession, Art Nouveau, Art Deco art movements and decorative styles. These included international publications such as *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art* (1893–1964), *Ver Sacrum* (1898–1903), *Pan* (1895–1900), and *Jugend* (1896–1940). Waller owned a copy of *Modern Book Illustrators and Their Work* (1914), published by the Studio and written by the journal’s editor Malcolm C. Salaman. The publication featured the work of Clark, Crane and others whose illustrations have parallels with Waller’s. As it is inscribed “Christian Yandell” she clearly acquired it sometime between 1914 and 1930, the period when she was focusing on book illustration.

Art magazines and journals were an important mode of transmitting international developments in the arts. Draffin contended that, from 1893, the British journal *The Studio* brought Australian art audiences into contact with new developments in British and European art and design, and art students were among those who eagerly sought out the journal. As was discussed in Chapter One, Waller’s early artworks and sketchbooks reveal a curiosity with popular currents of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British and European design. These indicate her formal tuition was augmented by the study of international developments by virtue of art journals, and this was most likely encouraged by her art teachers. As late as 1936, Waller was still

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purchasing copies of the journal and other associated publications, signalling its ongoing influence on her art.  

A number of Waller’s international contemporaries who produced illustrations were exploring the creative potential of the Art Nouveau aesthetic. This style, which was characterised by elaborate sinuous decorative forms inspired by nature, had a strong European following in the 1890s. National variations emerged in England, Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, France, Germany (known as Jugendstil), Italy, Spain and Austria. The movement was also felt by Australian artists, as seen in the paintings of Hall, the illustrations of David Henry ‘D. H.’ Souter (1862–1935), among others. It affected, to varying degrees, every branch of the arts between the 1890s and the 1940s.  

Although it flourished in architecture, interior and furniture design, the organic, curvilinear forms that characterise the Art Nouveau found a natural affinity with graphic art, such as prints, illustrations and posters. This aspect of the art movement is useful for understanding why Waller embraced an Art Nouveau aesthetic. She sought out aesthetic modes of expression that enabled her to draw upon her imaginative faculty—rather than standardised streamlined production of the machine age, particularly during the 1920s—and perceived underlying rhythms and decorative patterns in nature. Waller, as Sarmiala-Berger identified, used pattern and ornament in a symbolic manner. This is another way in which her works contribute to the discourse of spiritual art.  

Englishman Aubrey Beardsley (1872–98) was a significant fin de siècle artist whose linear, decorative yet macabre aesthetic has similarities with Waller’s early work. Waller produced a number of pen and ink illustrations, including an artwork previously attributed to Napier Waller Untitled [Fashion Illustration] (c. 1921) [Figure 68], which has stylistic and thematic similarities with the work of Beardsley. This is seen in the choice of medium and also in the theme of the work. The illustration depicts a maid in a traditional black uniform with a white hat and apron, bringing a cup of tea to an elegantly-dressed woman seated in front of a Japanese screen; a
black cat perches near her feet. The block of black and white and the screen signal Christian Waller’s awareness of Beardsley’s illustrations, which were influenced by Japanese illustration and printmaking.476

Beardsley also shared Waller’s disinterest in the mechanised world and a preference for decorative forms of expression. Like Waller some three decades later, he explored the popular themes of Symbolist art through a decorative Art Nouveau aesthetic; medieval Arthurian legends, the femme fatale, and the macabre.477 This is expressed in the illustrations he produced for the J. M. Dent’s publication of Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur (1893) which are characterised by a blend of linear rhythm, decorative stylisation and contrasting black-and-white forms. One of these

illustrations, *How Queen Guinevere made her a nun* [Figure 69], exemplifies the way in which Beardsley’s aesthetic resulted in richly expressive works. This image has parallels with Waller’s illustration for *The Renegades*, “She saw him, and she shivered, for he passed/ Reeling along the kerb. She followed him,” (1921) [Figure 70] seen in the use of large areas of flat black and white. Art historian Brigid Peppin has observed, Beardsley combined medieval art with his own aesthetic vision to create original illustrations. Waller followed a similar path when she drew on a wide repertoire of aesthetic and ideological influences to develop her distinctive illustrations.

Some of Waller’s illustrations echo Beardsley’s interest in the perverse nature of these themes; though not to the same extent. His application of the ‘new’ aesthetic outlined above for narratives was something Waller herself adopted when she illustrated Atkinson’s verse poems, *The Renegades* and *Queen Rosamond* in the 1920s. Making no reference to Australian imagery, these illustrations instead depicted an imaginary medieval world and expressed a decorative richness that aligned itself with the sensibilities of both Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau illustrators.

This is seen in illustrations such *Proof for Queen Rosamond* [Plate 5] [Figure 71]. In what appears to be a mystical court ritual, the illustrations incorporate references to antiquity (seen in some of the clothing, particularly that of the man holding up the woman in the centre of the images; and through the inclusion of the lyre in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture plane); medievalism (suggested by the intricate tapestry and some of the clothing) and to the modern period (seen in the elegant ball gown worn by the woman in the bottom right-hand corner). Through this combination of aesthetic references, it is clear that Waller’s image is not located in a specific time period, but is a highly-imaginative scene. Intricate linework and decorative patterns are utilised to convey the hedonism and mysticism that underpins

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478 McFarlane cited Beardsley as an influence of *The Renegades*, focusing on the illustration *This is God’s World*.


the story. This reflects both Waller’s attraction to such themes, and ability to bring them to life through her art. Viewed in this way, *Proof for ‘Queen Rosamond’* [Plate 5], along with the additional ten plates and other embellishments she produced for *Queen Rosamond*, exemplify the way in which she synthesised her concern for Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau approaches to the art of illustration with her interest in mysticism.

Leading Irish illustrator and stained glass artist Harry Clarke (1889–1931) was another major international artist whose art influenced Waller. Clarke, like Waller, conceived rich ornamentation and dynamic line work in his graphic and stained glass art.⁴⁸⁰ Bowe has highlighted the influence of Symbolism on Clarke’s aesthetic, through his predilection for dreamed narratives. The imagery is represented with deliberately ambiguous nuances; enigmatic, fatalistic, sensual and ominous figures, drawn from eclectic and obscure sources and closely related to contemporary literary, poetic and mystical ideas.⁴⁸¹

In 1918 Clarke completed a suite of illustrations for *Tales and Mysteries of Imagination* by Poe, which was first published in 1908. Revealing the influence of Beardsley through intricate design and erotic, grotesque subject matter, Clarke’s work has a distinctive mystical dimension not seen in Beardsley’s illustrations. The Irishman injected a dark introspection that matches the nihilistic mood of the stories.⁴⁸² A number of Waller’s illustrations, in particular those for *The Renegades* and *Queen Rosamond*, have an affinity with Clarke’s aesthetic. The fact that she owned a copy of Clarke’s illustrations supports this observation.⁴⁸³

Clarke’s combination of nihilism and introspection is conveyed through his illustration for Poe’s Gothic short story *Berenice* (1835) [Figure 72]. In the image, he emphasised Egaeus’ (the protagonist) tendency to remove himself from the ‘real world’ and become immersed in the fantasies of his mind. This was done by repeating Egaeus’ figure, first seated in the lower left-hand side of the illustration and staring out of the picture plane, then diagonally opposite. Here he appears floating and holding the corpse of his beloved Berenice, which he has removed from its grave.

⁴⁸³ Waller also owned copies of Clarke illustrations for Goethe’s *Faust* and Charles Perrault’s fairy tales. Observed by the author during a visit to the Waller House in May 2011.
in an act of psychotic passion. The lines of the hair and clothing in the image are sinuous and express the nightmarish yet provocative tale. Clarke’s illustrations are reminiscent and illuminate the hedonistic themes of Poe’s text through symbolism and decorative expression.

Waller’s illustrations for _The Renegades_ have a similar visual impact. In one [Figure 73], the female protagonist trapped by a satanic, beastly figure into the depths of hell. The struggle between good and evil is expressed, with women symbolic of good and men of the struggle between good and evil, in this instance. The illustration is both decorative and introspective. Surrounded by snakes and the luxurious feathers of a peacock, the woman is in a mystical environment that is far removed from Waller’s Melbourne milieu of the 1920s, in which the work originated. The hybrid narratives and modern influences on Clarke’s art have much in common with Waller’s.

This included Clarke’s most striking illustration to Poe’s work, _Ligeia_ [Figure 74]. As discussed earlier, Waller also produced a now lost illustration for this story in 1920. Clarke’s work shows a woman wearing an elaborate dress with different patterns,

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484 This image has some parallels with the decadent prints of Norman Lindsay (1879–1969), the acclaimed Melbourne artist who wrote and illustrated a number of books throughout his career, and produced a considerable number of prints. Waller’s representation of women in this and other illustrations for _The Renegades_ is decidedly less erotic than those of Lindsay’s ‘fleshy’ etchings he produced at the time. Lindsay, for his part, was concerned with challenging moral conventions and celebrating the vitality and sensual appeal of the human body.

485 The artwork is listed as number 183 in the exhibition catalogue. *Victorian Artists’ Society Annual Autumn Exhibition*, unpaginated.
while her breasts are exposed. A man kneels at her feet, stretching his arms towards her as he cuts a lock from her long hair that is longer than her dress. The man seems trapped in dense pattern at the base of the image, while a mountain is visible behind him. The frieze-like quality of the image and expressive use of pattern has much in common with Waller’s graphic work. However it is the sun that sits like a giant halo behind the woman’s head that appears to have informed her work. The sun dominates the images and is composed of a series of circular patterns—including stars—with pointed rays emanating from the outer rim. Waller’s use of the sun as a central motif for spiritual expression is seen throughout her œuvre, including in her bookplate [Figure 7] and the print Peace on Earth [Figure 75], which also features a dominant sun composed of different patterned circles, and on the frontispiece of The Gates of Dawn [Figure 76]. Cleary, Waller was looking to like-minded artists like Clarke to refine her symbolic visual language.

Figure 74: Harry Clarke, Ligeia, c. 1918, from: Edgar Allen Poe’s Tales of Mystery & Imagination, New York: Chartwell Books, 2010

Figure 75: Peace on Earth, 1927, linocut printed in black ink from two blocks, printed image 16.4 x 9.5 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1979

Figure 76: Frontispiece, 1932, from: The Gates of Dawn, Melbourne: Gryphon Press, 1977

Nielsen’s mystical illustrations were also important influences on Waller’s work,
as they had been on Clarke’s. In particular, the twenty-five colour plates from *East of the Sun and West of the Moon: Tales From the North* (1914). In these illustrations Nielsen combined pattern and imagery from different artistic traditions—including Byzantine, Norse, Japanese and Middle-Eastern sources—to create evocative works that sit on the nexus between decadence, mysticism and cynicism.

A copy of this book is in the Waller House; it includes Waller’s bookplate on the front endpapers, a sign of its importance to her. Its significance is further demonstrated by the fact Waller drew on the title for her only known secular window, the baptistery-sized window *East of the Sun and West of the Moon* (c. 1932–35) [Figure 7] that she made for Tallis. The window features a woman wearing a crown of stars a long robe floating on the right-hand side; Norse and Celtic patterns are located around the lower half of her cape and on her shoes. Her upper body curves in the direction of a man that floats diagonally from the left of the image towards her face. He wears a robe composed of decorative pieces of glass. A bright orange sun is behind him, whereas a crescent moon is behind the woman; symbols of masculinity and femininity respectively. The background between the figures includes purple, pink and blue glass, embellished with a bubble-like pattern, whereas they appear left above the figures features stylised flowers and the sky. The use of pattern, symbols and sinuous line in *East of the Sun and West of the Moon* owes a stylistic debt to Nielsen that was first expressed in Waller’s illustrations.

Figure 77: *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, c. 1932–35, stained glass, Beleura House and Garden, Mornington, Victoria


487 The illustrations accompany fifteen fairy tales that were gathered by Norwegian folklorists Peter Christen Asbjørnsen (1812–85) and Jørgen Engebretsen Moe (1813–82).

Colin White, “As Books Become Art, an Artist Rises to the Top,” in *East of the Sun and West of the Moon: Old Tales from the North*, ed. Noel Daniel (Cologne: Taschen, 2015), p. 44.
This is seen in Waller’s contributions to *Australian Fairy Tales* where she used hair for decorative expression, a technique developed from Nielsen’s influence. On the frontispiece, *Prince Waratah Goes to the Rescue of the Princess* [Figure 78], the Prince is shown riding in a sleigh powered by birds with his medium-length hair pointed backwards; Waller employed strong lines to indicate the backwards thrust of his hair. Nielsen employed a similar device in the illustration *The North Wind Goes Over the Sea* [Figure 79] from the tale *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*. Indeed throughout his illustrations in the book hair of male and female characters assumes an expressive, decorative function, best expressed in *So the Man Gave Him a Pair of Snowshoes* [Figure 80], in *The Three Princesses of Whiteland*. During her period of relief printmaking and creation of stained glass, Waller increasingly depicted hair in a similar manner, seen in the frontispiece for *The Gates of Dawn* and other works.\(^{488}\) Clearly, her engagement with illustration did not end when she ceased working as a commercial illustrator, but continued to inform the direction of her work, further emphasising the interconnected nature of her work across media.

This discussion has highlighted the key international influences on the illustrations.

\(^{488}\) Specifically, in the print *The Woman of Faery* (1932) and the stained-glass window *The Leckie Window* (1935), which are discussed later in this thesis.
Waller produced in the 1920s. It has also brought into focus illustrations that have not been previously discussed in scholarship on Waller to offer a more nuanced understanding of her art practice. Her illustrations from the 1920s reflect her personal interest in myth, fantasy and personal spiritual expression, as well as her embrace of Arts and Crafts values. I will now focus discussion on *The Gates of Dawn* and demonstrate how this book emerged from Waller’s earlier period of book illustrations and espoused the principles of the Arts and Crafts ‘Ideal’ book on the one hand, and, on the other, her personal quest to communicate her aesthetic and spiritual beliefs through her art.

**Unity of Word, Image and Message: Waller’s *The Gates of Dawn*: A Book Made For the Young**

The symbolic spiritual expression that underpinned Waller’s *œuvre* is powerfully conveyed in her 1932 children’s book, *The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young*. The decorative visual language of Waller’s book is underscored by its mystical theme. In lieu of primary material to explain the inception of the work—save for the original manuscript—it is necessary to look to the narrative, design and illustrations to determine Waller’s objectives in creating this important work that has until now not been examined in detail.

*The Gates of Dawn* is a clear example of the way in which Waller’s spirituality drove her art. The story is set in a mystical land featuring two adolescents attempting to overpower an evil witch and, with the guidance of an earth mother, reach spiritual enlightenment. The book, I argue, is an allegory that was created to raise the spiritual awareness of its intended audience, which included the young people Waller drew around her. 489 Given the diversity of Waller’s spiritual interests, a membership to the library of the Theosophical Society’s Melbourne Lodge facilitated access to diverse mystical texts, many of which were concerned with common concepts of salvation,

489 Butler described Pate, Talis, Tatlock Miller and artist Ron Meadows (1913–88) as Waller’s “Children”.

reincarnation and spiritual enlightenment. In addition to these influences, there is also a strong Christian foundation to the book that is a reminder of the pantheistic nature of Waller’s sense of the spiritual.

Analysis of the plot of *The Gates of Dawn* assists in the identification of its spiritual themes. The plot is succinctly summarised by Waller on the opening page:

This is the Story of the boy Christopher and the Girl, telling how Christopher met the Daughter of the Sun and became a man: and how with the Girl’s aid he vanquished the Witch of the World and reached the Gates of Dawn.

The story revolves around two children, the Girl (who is not given any other name) and the boy, called Christopher, who plot to overcome the evil Witch of the World. In this mission they are guided by the Daughter of the Sun and the Witch’s black talking cat, Thomas [Figure 81], who although reluctant at the start of the story, betrays his mistress and helps Christopher and the Girl overpower her. He eventually joins them as they enter through the Gates of Dawn, and symbolically transforms into a white cat to represent his transition from evil to good. In this way the cat possesses a quality associated with Thomas the Apostle in Christianity—that of doubting. Christopher, moreover, represents Jesus Christ, the saviour of

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490 McFarlane has asserted that, although not a member of the Society, Waller regularly attended lectures and had a membership to the library at the Melbourne Lodge.


492 In the New Testament Gospel of John, St Thomas is described as having doubted the Second Coming of Christ (John 20: 25).

Ayt, Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, s. v. “St Thomas,” p. 1378.
humankind in Christianity. As such, Waller has combined Christian and alternative spiritual philosophies in the book.

The plot of *The Gates of Dawn* draws on the archetypes of the fairy tale narratives to convey spiritual messages. Specifically, Waller has drawn on the tradition of tales which feature an evil woman setting out to harm children with potions and other mystical devices.⁴⁹³ The story starts with the Witch talking to Thomas about Christopher, describing him as a “silly boy, [who] sits up half the night singing verses in the moonlight”.⁴⁹⁴ The Witch, who dislikes such goodness, is making a potion for Christopher to bring him under her spell.

Christopher and the Girl’s journey to spiritual enlightenment is facilitated by the Daughter of the Sun. The Daughter of the Sun lives beyond the Gates of Dawn, and invites the children into her magical garden, beyond which lie the Gates of Dawn. She is presented as a spiritual guide and healer and has given special charms to the Girl and to Christopher to make them love everyone and ward off evil respectively. The charm is an ancient Egyptian Ankh, an important spiritual symbol that—as is discussed in Chapter Seven—signifies life. The Daughter of the Sun, like Christopher, spends much of her time singing to the flowers in her garden, kissing the flowers and talking to them.

Although drawing on the hallmarks of fairy tale genre, Waller’s narrative is underscored by symbolic mystical messages that relate directly to her spiritual

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inclinations at that time. The Daughter of the Sun’s garden has an important symbolic role in the story, reinforced by the imagery used on the page in which it is introduced [Figure 82]. When the Witch appears close to victory by capturing Christopher and the Girl, the flowers in the garden begin to wilt; described as being ‘sad’ this personification of the environment reinforces the importance of the natural world in the story.

These mystical references are reinforced by the exceptional illustrations, embellishments and the text, which are unquestionably Waller’s finest book illustrations. Her depiction of the Daughter of the Sun is particularly revealing of the spiritual messages she sought to communicate through the book. The frontispiece [Figure 83] has strong ties to Christian devotional imagery. The Daughter of the Sun is shown seated on an altar, her arms outstretched suggesting she is both receiving and giving off spiritual energy. Her feet are held together pointing down, giving the effect of a floating angel or saint, seen in religious imagery, including the ecclesiastical stained glass Waller produced at the time and up until the late 1940s. The robe she is wearing also signifies this connection, and is embellished with floral motifs, including stylised lotuses.

Floral imagery is incorporated throughout this illustration and it symbolises the Daughter of the Sun’s connection to the natural environment. A halo of non-native flowers forms around the Daughter of the Sun, as seen in the frontispiece. This is particularly interesting, as the halos surround an image of the sun and appear to reflect the natural order of things and are feeding off the rays of the sun. In this, Waller conflates the image of the Daughter of the Sun with that of the natural environment.
Another illustration later in the book, which depicts the Daughter of the Sun welcoming Christopher into her magical garden [Figure 84], emphasises how her connection with nature contributes to her role as a spiritual seer. In this illustration Waller again uses hair as a compositional device, as the Daughter of the Sun’s flowing hair is depicted in a way that renders it part of the landscape of the garden, as with her flowing robe decorated with lilies—symbols of purity—that also surround her body. The strong vertical line and rich ornamentation, which have an affinity with the work of Michael Polowny (1871–1954) and Berthold Löffler (1874–1960) and others who formed part of the Vienna Secession, reinforce this connection.\(^\text{495}\) The movement flourished in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and emphasised the concepts of ‘art for art’s sake’ and ‘the sacred spring’. The development of new modes of visual expression that celebrated individuality was central to the Secession.\(^\text{496}\) The Daughter of the Sun has a particular affinity with the graphic work of Löffler, especially his *Ex Libris Karl Moser* (1905) [Figure 85]. Appearing somewhat like the figure in Löffler’s bookplate, The Daughter of the Sun is weighed down in a flowing and ornamental cloak, her arms symbolically reaching out. This echoes the symbolic, densely-patterned paintings of Secession artist Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), such as his 1894 ceiling mural *Hygeia* [*Detail from Medicine*] [Figure 86]. Christopher, by contrast, with his simple, unembellished costume, stands apart from this backdrop, symbolising that he is yet to reach manhood and pass through the Gates of Dawn. Here, and in each illustration featured in the book, Waller’s decorative aesthetic is driven by symbolic expression.

\(^{495}\) Draffin, “Shared Symbols, Private and Public: Christian and Napier Waller,” p. 49.

Waller’s engagement with Arts and Crafts modes of production is also seen in the design of the *The Gates of Dawn*. The relationship between illustrations and text in *The Gates of Dawn* highlights Waller’s ongoing commitment to Arts and Crafts design principles. Although stylistically Waller had adopted a more dynamic modern aesthetic than the medieval style she embraced from her student years to the mid-1920s, ideologically she continued to work in a manner sympathetic to Arts and Crafts values. The illustrations and textual embellishments of *The Gates of Dawn* adhere to Morris’ claims for integrity in book design. For Morris and Crane, illustrations and decoration were only effective when they became ‘architectural’.

Each detail in the book has an important function. The ornamentation on each page responds to the text, and has a functional role, signifying each paragraph break [Figure 87]. Waller continues her espousal of Morris’ principles with the clear, bold typeface, and thick margins around each page, making the book legible and aesthetically pleasing. *The Gates of Dawn* highlights how Waller’s interest in the ideological aspects of the British Arts and Crafts Movement continued to inform her practice after she had moved away from the romantic medieval aesthetic promoted by this movement.

![Figure 87: “The strange thing was...”, 1932, page from: The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young, Melbourne: Gryphon Press, 1977](image-url)
While Waller embraced Arts and Crafts values in the design and execution of *The Gates of Dawn*, stylistically she synthesised a range of decorative forms to craft a distinct aesthetic. The original manuscript of *The Gates of Dawn* reveals that Waller conceived the work as a whole when drafting the story. Not only did she mark the start and end of each page, but she also used red pencil to colour several capital letters that she wanted emphasised [Figure 88]. Her annotations guided Pate when the latter published the work in 1977 under Gryphon Books. Design for *The Gates of Dawn* was overseen by Pate’s husband, graphic designer William ‘Bill’ Pate (1911–1997), who studied under Napier Waller at the Working Men’s College. Two editions were printed: 600 hardcover copies that were marginally smaller than Waller’s original lithographic plates, and 100 paperback copies, which were considerably smaller. The hardcover edition replicated the red letters Waller had indicated. Other embellishments on the manuscripts suggest the decorative embellishments Waller had planned to have a harmonious relationship between the illustrations and the text.

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499 Pate, “Klytie Pate Interviewed by James Murdoch.”
Waller drafted several other mystical children’s stories that also explore concepts of enlightenment and the supernatural. I located these stories in Waller Journal and Book of Stories and have transcribed and reproduced them in Appendix C. The most polished and longest of these is *The Woman of Faery*, which also includes a powerful female protagonist. Some of the language and phrasing in this story has parallels with Victorian-era poetry, especially Tennyson’s celebrated Arthurian poem *The Lady of Shalott* (1833; revised 1842) and demonstrates how her close affinity with literature informed her writing as well as her visual art.500 *The Woman of Faery* is an evocative story and combines the influence of the Celtic Revival with Christianity. An excerpt from the story highlights this:

> In the forest lay a deep spell—a hush like the silence of a dim cathedral spread over the tall trees and fragrant wild flowers, and the soul of the Woman of Faery was one great white prayer of peace.501

The protagonist’s magical powers are emphasised in the two illustrations Waller produced that were most likely intended to accompany this story in its published state.502

The existence of these stories and their mystical narratives demonstrates that Waller intended to publish a number of illustrated books that combined her text and illustrations, yet these plans were abandoned to undertake monumental art commissions independently and with her husband. Her original intention to expand her bookmaking is affirmed by the fact she established her own press, the Golden Arrow Press, in April 1932 to publish her printed books.503 The press’ name has mystical connotations. In Greek mythology the term ‘golden arrow’ refers to the arrow carried by Eros, the god of love and desire, known in Roman mythology as Cupid. In both traditions, an individual wounded by the golden arrow comes under a spell of romantic desires.504
Waller’s publishing ambitions were also discussed in a small newspaper article published at the time she made *The Great Breath*. It included a picture of Waller printing on her Victorian-era hand-printing press and was accompanied by a comment from an unnamed reporter, who stated that she was “conducting an experiment in the production of hand-printed books” and that she “hopes to publish one book a year”.505 However, in a postcard written to Tallis shortly after she published *The Great Breath*, Waller mentioned that she had to halt plans to publish her second book (*The Gates of Dawn*) in order to assist Napier Waller with the mosaic commission for Newspaper House in Collins Street, Melbourne.506 The increased demands of her stained-glass practice and the collaborative works she produced with her husband explain why she ceased illustrating books and making books from 1932.

**Conclusion**

Waller’s book illustrations marked an important period of artistic and spiritual development. Her choice to illustrate stories that explored mystical themes reflects the fact that she produced art that combined both her symbolic spiritual and artistic values. Rather than simply mimic the styles of other popular late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century illustrators, Waller crafted her own aesthetic from a wide range of predominately international influences. Additionally, although she responded to stories when producing her illustrations, she continually expressed her personal vision of the fantasy themes. This vision bore the legacy of the Victorian and Australian fascination with fairies and alternative spiritual enquiry, which is part of the discourse of spiritual art to which Waller’s contributed more broadly. She drew together these influences and, in her illustrations, tied them to the imagined mysteries of the rural Australian landscape. This imagined world was privileged over the ‘real’ world, which has almost no place in her artistic output.

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505 “Printing Books by Hand.”
506 Christian Waller, “Postcard to John Tallis [with Image of Ola Cohn working on the Fairies’ Tree on the front],” 26 February 1933, John Tallis Archive. Beleura House and Garden, Mornington, VIC.
The Gates of Dawn was an originally conceived artwork that drew together Waller’s personal engagement with alternative spiritual philosophies and commitment to Arts and Crafts values of the ideal book. On the surface, a children’s book, beautifully illustrated and designed, upon closer analysis it is apparent that this book is an allegory for spiritual enlightenment, good versus evil and the role of the enlightened in guiding the young.

Following this period of book illustration, in the late-1920s and early-1930s, Waller’s deepening spiritual values and search for new modes of artistic expression saw her travel overseas to reach out to an international community of spiritually-directed artists. During this time, she produced relief prints that powerfully drew together these influences, and her prints are discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Four

The Spiritual and Art: The Influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival on Christian Waller's Printmaking, Including *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs*

Figure 89: Unknown photographer, Untitled [Christian Waller at Her Printing Press], 1932, gelatin silver photograph, 8.7 x 14.9 cm, National Library of Australia, Canberra. Inscribed: "Klytie/ From/ Christian Waller"
The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs (1932) epitomises the profound influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Celtic Revival, and alternative spiritual enquiry on Waller’s art and life. Drawing on relief printmaking, she harnessed these influences to create didactic artworks that communicated the spiritual values she embraced at the time. The Celtic Revival, I argue in this chapter, was an important influence on The Great Breath and other relief prints she produced in the 1920s and early-1930s. She identified with the Celtic world; her Celtic heritage was a particular source of pride and inspiration. While this influence has been flagged by other authors, it has not been investigated in detail. I show that the influence of Waller’s Celtic heritage was felt in three key areas of the arts: visual art, literature and music, and is expressed in her relief prints, especially The Great Breath. Her engagement with the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival thus formed part of her broader spiritual interests.

The first aim of this chapter is to investigate the circumstances that led Waller to take up relief printmaking in the early 1920s. Close analysis of her early prints illustrates that through printmaking—in particular linocut printmaking—she was able to synthesise her artistic and spiritual influences in a more personal manner than was possible through her commercial book illustrations. Attention then moves to the second key aim, which is to establish that Waller’s exceptional printed book, The Great Breath, was the product of her attempt to achieve the harmony of word, image and message as part of her quest to communicate spiritual values through her art. This quest was crystallised following her travels overseas in 1929–30, including to the Celtic lands of Cornwall and Ireland. By reviewing extant literature on The Great Breath, I draw attention to the fact this book has rarely been appraised within the context of Waller’s whole body of work.

Investigating the influence of the Celtic Revival on Waller’s practice focusing on her prints, is the third key aim of this chapter. This includes a detailed visual analysis of each print and the binding of The Great Breath. As a direct result of introducing new primary material into scholarship—including artworks and ephemera—I am able to demonstrate that the Celtic Revival was a more salient influence on Waller’s practice during the 1920s and 1930s than has been maintained in previous scholarship.

The final aim of this chapter is to position Waller’s key prints within the discourses of the Celtic Revival and spiritual art. Through exposure to the art, literature and
music associated with the Revival both in Australia and in the Celtic world—she harnessed a range of influences that informed her printmaking. During her trip, she sought out key artists and spiritual thinkers, most notably the Irish poet, artist, mystic and statesman George William Russell ‘Æ’, along with expatriate Australian stained-glass artist and occult figure J. B. Trinick and prominent Irish writer Lord Dunsany. Rather than a reclusive artist as some scholars have framed her, I demonstrate that Waller actively engaged in a community of like-minded creative individuals who looked to the myths, legends and mysticism associated with the Celtic Revival for inspiration.

**Waller’s Embrace of Printmaking**

Before attention turns to the influence of the Celtic Revival on Waller’s prints, it is necessary to examine the circumstances that led her to embrace printmaking in the early 1920s. Although a gifted painter, Waller had a preference for the less-revered medium of illustration in the early phase of her career, and there is no evidence that she engaged with printmaking prior to the early 1920s. Printmaking, I argue, facilitated Waller’s artistic growth that led to the refinement of her spiritually-directed practice and her use of symbols. Her prints were made for her personal enjoyment, and for her friends and family, giving her total control over the conception, creation and dissemination of her work. This allowed her to delve deeper into her spiritual interests to develop symbolic narratives, many of which bear the influence of the Celtic Revival.

Waller’s interest in modern forms of relief printmaking in the 1920s mirrored a broader trend in the Australian art community; yet her choice of subject matter and expression was unique. Although prints had been made in Australia since the colonial period, it was not until after the First World War—when modernism flourished in all forms of art—that relief printmaking became a popular form of expression. In the colonial era printmaking was mainly produced in the form of printed copies of paintings; given there was little recognition that the medium could also be used to create artworks. Consequently, printmaking, then considered a ‘craft’, was not taught.

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507 For clarity, I refer to Russell as Æ throughout this thesis.
formally in art schools.\textsuperscript{509} Despite the limited access to formal tuition in printmaking for emerging artists of Waller’s generation, Australia did have an active culture of artists working in the medium in the early twentieth century. Two of the Lindsay Brothers—Lionel and Norman (1879–1969)—were the best-known Australian printmakers prior to the First World War.\textsuperscript{510} Their efforts played an important role in advancing the creative potential of printmaking that modern artists like Waller responded to.

The absence of relief printmaking from Waller’s juvenile \textit{œuvre} highlights the marginalised place of the medium—when compared to other forms of visual art—prior to the embrace of modernism in Australia during the inter-war period. Before 1920s, there were few artists making relief prints.\textsuperscript{511} Waller, like others of her generation, was exposed to printmaking through art and design magazines like London’s \textit{The Studio}, which was discussed in the previous chapter. As Draffin argued, woodcuts and other forms of printmaking featured in \textit{The Studio} were introduced to an interested Australian art community that was beginning to value the creative potential of printmaking. He singled out a special volume of the magazine on printmaking by Malcolm C. Salaman, \textit{Modern Woodcuts and Lithographs (by French and British Artists)}, published in 1919 as an influence on the production of woodcuts by Australian artists in the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{512} Although Waller made linocuts, there is a well understood technical and stylistic connection between woodcuts and linocuts.\textsuperscript{513} Given her attraction to art forms that achieved their visual impact through line and pattern, she may well have responded to Salaman’s claim that “the graphic glory of woodcut for original expression is in its splendid potentialities of black and white in luminous contrast, whether in mass or in line”.\textsuperscript{514} Salaman’s view mirrors that of artists like Waller who, in the 1920s, were embracing the linocut medium.

In Australia, the two main strands of modernist relief printing occurred in Sydney and Melbourne, and had little in common with Waller’s practice. In Sydney, Margaret Preston (1876–1962), Thea Proctor (1879–1966), Adrian Feint (1894–1971) and Adelaide Perry (1891–1973) were amongst the leading printmakers. As Deutscher

\textsuperscript{509} Grant, \textit{In Relief: Australian Wood Engravings, Woodcuts and Linocuts}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{510} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{511} Deutscher and Butler, \textit{A Survey of Australian Relief Prints: 1900–1950}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{512} Draffin, \textit{Australian Woodcuts and Linocuts of the 1920s and 1930s}, p. 4.
and Butler have observed, the style advanced by these artists in the 1920s emphasises surface pattern and stylisation, making direct links “between relief printing and the modern movement”.515 These works were modern in their vitalist expression and, in the case of Preston, reference Japanese aesthetics.516 Although conveying strong decorative qualities, the style of these prints reflects a leisured existence that is distinct from the spiritual intensity of Waller’s art. Rather than responding to the patterns and forms associated with modern life—albeit a leisured one—Waller drew upon styles advanced by the decorative movements of European modernism, and vested these with her spiritual worldview.

In Melbourne, where Waller lived and worked, there was no one dominant expression in modern printmaking. Nonetheless, the arcane themes of Waller’s prints presented a less-accessible aesthetic to the work of her contemporaries such as Eveline Syme (1888–1961), Ethel Spowers (1890–1947) and Eric Thake (1904–1982). The overall characteristic of Melbourne’s relief printmaking in the 1920s and 1930s was the preference for “more literal” subject matter than “their stylish Sydney contemporaries”.517 These themes, however, engaged with the modern and natural world in a manner that Waller’s prints did not. Interest in mysticism is largely absent from these works.

The spiritual themes of Waller’s linocut prints ran counter to those explored by her prominent Australian contemporaries. Her profound engagement with the values of both the Celtic Revival and the Arts and Crafts Movement was not shared by other Australian printmakers active in the 1920s and 1930s.518 A significant influence on her contemporaries was the teaching of colour linocut printing by Claude Flight (1881–1955) and modernist painting by Iain Macnab (1890–1967) at London’s Grosvenor School of Modern Art, where several Australian printmakers studied during the 1920s and 1930s.519 Although the Grosvenor School promoted modern movements including Vorticism and Italian Futurism without their “manifesto oriented base”, the dynamic modernist style they advanced influenced the aesthetic

515 Deutsher and Butler, A Survey of Australian Relief Prints: 1900–1950, p. 27.
517 Deutsher and Butler, A Survey of Australian Relief Prints: 1900–1950, p. 43.
518 Napier Waller’s printmaking was influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement, but not to the same extent. The similarities and differences between the art of Christian and Napier Waller—including their prints—is examined in Chapter Six.
519 Deutsher and Butler, A Survey of Australian Relief Prints: 1900–1950, p. 43.
of many Australians who studied under Macnab and Flight. For example Syme’s print *Skating* (c. 1930) [Figure 90], which employs dominant linework to create the impression of energy and movement, is exemplary of Futurism. The aesthetic of Australians who studied under Flight highlights the alternative nature of Waller’s printmaking.

Waller was not influenced by Flight and instead refined her symbolic approach to art in her prints, informed by the confluence of decorative movements that emerged through late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century European modernism. She was familiar with British modernism, which had its greatest impact on Australian art during the 1930s and particularly through the linocut medium. It did not, however, have a major influence on her artistic outlook, which was instead informed by decorative and symbolic spiritual expression. This does not mean that Waller was not a modern artist.

Gray has shown that a number of Australia artists participated in the international art community in the first few decades of the twentieth century. I argue that Waller was part of this group, and that her embrace of linocut printmaking highlights her interest in modern modes of expression that offered a new vehicle to apply her rich linear aesthetic to symbolic expression. A dynamic form of printmaking that was invented at the turn of the twentieth century, linocutting was viewed by many modern artists as a contemporary medium that could express their modernist aesthetic. Commonly, it was informed by the geometric and mechanical forms

523 Draffin, Australian Woodcuts and Linocuts of the 1920s and 1930s, pp. 5-7.
synonymous with modernity, in contrast to Waller’s decorative style. In Australia, the medium was popularised by Napier Waller, upon his return from the First World War in 1917, although it had been used sporadically by Australian printmakers since the late-1890s.524

Linocut printing correlated with the linear expression that was advanced by the decorative art movements of European modernism. This was particularly influential to Waller, who worked almost exclusively with the medium when producing prints.525 Part of its appeal was the ease of reproduction, as linoleum is “close-textured, softer and more easily worked than wooden blocks”.526 This made it ideal for achieving the sweeping linear and decorative expression that Waller favoured. This can be seen in the bookplate she designed for herself [Figure 9.1]. It features the sinuous linework popularised by the Art Nouveau style coupled with floral embellishments executed in an Arts and Crafts aesthetic. Compositionally, it has an affinity with Crane’s socialist illustration A Garland for May Day (1895) [Figure 9.2]. In Waller’s print, however, the ornamentation is sleeker and more refined, reflecting the linocut process. For Waller,

524 He had experimented with linocutting during his convalescence in England, a country that played a leading role in promoting the creative potential of the medium, namely through the efforts of Flight in the 1920s and 1930s. Butler, Printed Images by Australian Artists 1885–1955, pp. 175, 99.
525 The original impression of The Gates of Dawn was printed lithographically. The matrices are all held at the National Gallery of Australia, except for one which is in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria.
526 Draffin, Australian Woodcuts and Linocuts of the 1920s and 1930s, p. 6.
the art of linocutting was similar to that of illustration, in that it could be utilised to express flowing linear rhythms and heightened contrasts of black and white forms.

Waller’s objective to create narrative-driven artworks that communicated spiritual values was facilitated by her engagement with linocut printmaking. It provided her with a new platform through which she could create art that drew together her artistic values, and could be circulated amongst her network of like-minded individuals. Freed from commercial limitations that required her to illustrate texts she had not written, Waller was able to develop her own narratives and incorporate her favoured symbols.

The Appeal of the Celtic Revival and the Arts and Crafts Movement: Waller’s Celtic Heritage

The symbolism and narratives Waller explored through her relief prints reveal an engagement with the art and literature of the Celtic Revival and the British Arts and Crafts Movement. This influence is particularly apparent in *The Great Breath*. A discussion of the Celtic Revival, with particular reference to the visual arts and the writings of Æ, offers a useful platform for considering its appeal to Waller and the ways in which it influenced her relief printmaking and broader œuvre.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the Celtic Revival flourished in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In addition to political aspirations, it fostered an appreciation of the applied, decorative and graphic arts, as well as interest in literature, music, folklore, mysticism and the occult. Like the British Arts and Crafts Movement, this Revival emerged from the earlier Gothic Revival, which was informed by archaeological discoveries of medieval art and artefacts, as well as being a reaction against the industrialisation of society, in particular as regards the arts.527 The search for a unique Celtic identity in Scotland and especially in Ireland—and a subsequent rejection of Englishness—was central to the Revival. In this way, as

527 Loverance, *Christian Art*, p. 78.
scholar Gregory Castle has observed, the Revival was a key component of the project of cultural redemption. 528

This redemptive aspect was particularly strong in Ireland, where the Revival was rooted in the reclaiming of national identity by looking back to the art and literature prior to the first English conquest in the twelfth century and subsequent rule of the nation through to the early twentieth century. 529 This is significant for research on Waller, as the themes of Irish folklore include mythology, mysticism and faery. 530 A number of Irish artists, writers and poets of the Celtic Revival were associated with spiritual enquiry and the occult, as Castle contends: “the spiritual, the visionary, the occult are fit subjects of concern for Irish writers because they are essentially related to the true Celtic nature”. 531 This interest extended into the visual arts, including the applied arts of stained glass, which incorporated references to Celtic mythology and also Celtic design work. Indeed, at the vanguard of the Celtic Revival were a number of visual artists whose work expresses shared interests to Waller’s, in particular her graphic art and stained glass. 532 These media have the potential to communicate literary narratives, which was central to the Revival.

Bowe has identified a strong link between occult art and the art of the Celtic Revival. She has argued that fin de siècle visual arts in Ireland were inspired by mysticism and the occult, with a strong basis in Celtic folklore and history. 533 This included book illustration and stained glass, media favoured by Waller as platforms for spiritual expression. The link was mediated through an engagement with the Symbolist movement, a movement that had strong literary roots, and had a far-reaching influence from its origins in France—home of the Celtic nation of Brittany—through to the United Kingdom and also to Australia. 534 The literary response to this movement was expressed through the revival of Celtic languages, myths and legends.

528 Gregory Castle, Modernism and the Celtic Revival (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.
529 Loverance, Christian Art, p. 77.
530 Faery is an alternative spelling of ‘fairy’ which was embraced by those associated with the Celtic Revival. Waller herself adopted this spelling, and used it in her print and illustration entitled The Woman of Faery, both 1932.
533 Blakesley, The Arts and Crafts Movement, p. 94.
534 Castle, Modernism and the Celtic Revival, p. 59.
The Celtic Revival had an appeal that spread to the non-Celt and those with Celtic ancestry, like Waller. Musicologist Peter Tregear, who has examined the influence of the Celtic Revival on Australian music, contended that:

> For artists not directly connected to Ireland or associated political causes, the imagined fringe-dwelling Celt could therefore serve as an attractive cipher for the anxiety they felt towards the ‘mainstream’, however that was defined.535

Given Waller’s own exploration of mythology and alternative spiritual practices, her whole artistic output can be viewed as a rejection of ‘the mainstream’. Furthermore, her Celtic ancestry and identification with this aspect of her heritage, as outlined in Chapter Two, demonstrates that the Revival was one of the influences she harnessed to develop her spiritually-directed practice.

This is evidenced by the work she produced which explicitly engages with Celtic themes immediately prior to her exploration of relief printmaking. An example is the pen and ink illustration, *Ethlinn* (1921), [Figure 93] based on an obscure figure from Celtic mythology. The narrative indicates that Celtic legends were a part of the wide range of literature she read at that time. Ethlinn was believed to be the daughter of Balor, a one-eyed giant who imprisoned her in a crystal tower in a vain attempt to prevent the fulfilment of a prophecy that he would be killed by his only grandchild. Ethlinn nonetheless bore the son of one of the Cian brothers, after he broke into the tower. Their child, the sun god Lugh, was an important figure in Celtic mythology.536 The fact that Waller depicted the mother of the Celtic sun god connects this work with her engagement with solar symbolism and powerful women that, as we

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saw in the previous chapter, is particularly apparent in *The Gates of Dawn*, which features a character called the Daughter of the Sun.

*Ethlinn* was among a group of artworks inspired by Celtic mythology that Waller produced in the late 1910s and early 1920s. In 1923 she exhibited four Celtic-themed works at Melbourne’s Decoration Galleries: drawings *The Meeting of Naoise and Deidre* and *The Sidhe* and watercolours *Ossian and Niamp* and *Illustration to Yeats’ *Shadowy Waters’* [Figure 42]. These narratives are associated with magic and prophecy, especially the female characters. Waller favoured female figures with magical powers and used symbols to convey their mystical talents. This encompassed popular characters from the Arthurian myths, drawn on for the illustrations *Merlin and Nimue* (1920) [Figure 2] and the watercolours *Gateway to Nowhere* (1919) [Figure 46], *Tristan and Isolde* (c. 1920) and *Morgan Le Fay and King Uriens* (1920) [Figure 94]. However, it is her magnificent colour linocut, *Morgan Le Fay* (1927) [Figure 95] that epitomises her engagement with the Celtic Revival.

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537 This included *Illustration to Yeats’ “Shadowy Waters”* that I examined in the previous chapter.

538 The whereabouts of the other works—except for *Illustration to Yeats’ “Shadowy Waters”*, which was discussed in the previous chapter—is not known.

539 Waller painted *Morgan Le Fay* on a panel of one of the dining chairs in the Waller House. It was part of a set of chairs with painted panels. This work is held in a private collection and was exhibited in her two solo exhibitions.

In *Morgan Le Fay*, Waller celebrated the spiritual power of the sorceress through use of symbols and ornament along with the application of gold paint. The print shows Morgan Le Fay—whose surname is French for ‘the fairy’—standing in the centre of the image wearing a gold crown on top of her long braided hair. She is clothed in an orange dress that is embroidered around the hem of the skirt and a long decorative blue cloak with gold embellishments. In her right hand she holds a chalice while her left pours liquid into it, with her closed eyes she is deep in thought casting a spell. Waller includes numerous symbols in the background, which is a room in a medieval castle. In the lower left is a table with a vase holding yellow roses—symbols of infidelity—and grapes—symbols of luxury. An oval mirror rests against the table, revealing the reflection of an imprisoned man, and a pile of books—the top one open—rests in front of the mirror. Medieval armour including a shield—symbolising Tristram’s shield that Le Fay purportedly stole—is located in the bottom right of the image, above which several keys hang on the wall. A large Chinese textile drapes behind Le Fay. It depicts a green dragon and references the medieval myth that these mystical beasts guarded captive women. In the upper left is a window that looks outdoors to reveal a knight riding on horseback in a sunlit field.

Waller’s immersion in the values and artistic expressions of the Arts and Crafts Movement and Celtic Revival is reflected in her domestic environment in Melbourne. She created a number of artworks inspired by Arthurian and Celtic legends, as well as the poetry of William Morris and William Butler Yeats during her student years of 1910–14. This interest continued into the 1920s, and its significance is expressed in the home Waller and her husband designed and decorated in Ivanhoe, Victoria, which I analyse in detail in Chapter Six.

Waller took up printmaking when she moved into this house in around 1922. Her first known print, *The Sorceress* [*Figure 9*], dates from that year. This early print reveals the clarity of decorative expression that emerged following her adoption of the linocut medium. It features a woman wearing an elaborate medieval dress and patterned cloak and a tiara, holding a lit candle and a leopard by a lead. She stands calmly in a dense wood, while a group of people look on from a distance, intrigued by—yet wary of—the powerful woman. A castle surrounded by a moat is just visible

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541 Ibid., p. 413.
in the background, and locates the work in a mystical, medieval setting. Rather than referring to a specific figure, the print is an example of how Waller synthesised her interest in symbolism and spiritual expression through printmaking to create works in which she developed her own myths. In *The Sorceress*, Waller highlighted the spiritual power of a woman who has command of the animal kingdom, signified by her taming of the wild leopard, the natural world, and her human beings.

The Sorceress assumes the archetypal role of the medieval sorceress, or witch, who cast a spell on a town, signified by the group of figures behind her looking anxiously at the mysterious woman. She is not lost amongst the decorative pattern of the print: unlike the enveloped *Ethlinn*, the *Sorceress* stands out amongst it.542 A series of flat masses—many of them filled with pattern—and strong verticals delineate the pictorial drama. The strength of the image is the harmony of its Arts and Crafts sensibilities and the manner in which Waller has communicated this narrative through the linocut medium. By Arts and Crafts sensibilities I refer to the medieval imagery in this print, her exclusive use of black ink that resembles early forms of printing which emerged during the Middle Ages, and the use of a bone coloured

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542 Morris’ Kelmscott press publication of Sidonia the Sorceress (1893), appears a likely source of inspiration for Waller’s narrative. The story, written by Johannes Wilhelm Meinhold in 1847, is based on the life of a sixteenth-century noblewoman, Sidonia von Bork, who was burned at the stake for allegedly using witchcraft to bring down a German Ducal house. When translated by Lady Jane Wilde (under her pseudonym Francesca Speranza), mother of Oscar Wilde, in 1849, the protagonist became a muse for Pre-Raphaelite artists with a penchant for depicting sexually deviant females from the literary and historical canon.

woven paper that adds an aged quality to the work. Waller’s preference for brown and bone paper is seen throughout her engagement with relief printmaking; she favoured inexpensive paper that did not have a watermark. *The Sorceress*, therefore, although retaining the medieval tone of Waller’s early work, is a bridge between this style and the expressive modern aesthetic the artist developed through her printmaking, which is best expressed in *The Great Breath*.

**An “Art Deco Artist’s Book”?: Reappraising Waller’s *The Great Breath***

In 1932 Waller produced the hand-bound, artist’s book of linocuts *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs*, which presents a powerful synthesis of her aesthetic and spiritual interests. These include the Celtic Revival and the Arts and Crafts Movement, as well as Christianity, Theosophy, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and other spiritual philosophies. This major work—along with *The Gates of Dawn*—is the most succinct expression of the way in which she incorporated her aesthetic and spiritual beliefs in her graphic art. It has been framed as an “Art Deco artist’s book”, however I argue that the Art Deco influences on the work have been overstated.543 While influenced by strands of this popular design aesthetic, the work is underpinned by a concern with spiritual evolution and Arts and Crafts values as opposed to exploring modern materials and celebrating the machine age.544 Waller, I argue, retained her commitment to Arts and Crafts values and methods of production, but embraced the forward-looking yet historically-inspired qualities of the Art Deco style. For her Art Deco was not about modern industry, rather, it was about accessing new spiritual horizons built on historic pattern and ornament.

543 David Thomas has written described *The Great Breath* and *The Gates of Dawn* as “Two of Australia’s finest books in the Art Deco style”. In the catalogue for the *Art Deco: 1910–1939* (2008) exhibition at the NGV, curator Kirsty Grant described *The Great Breath* as “perhaps the only true Art Deco artist’s book ever printed in Australia...”.


544 The moniker Art Deco was coined in the 1960s from the French term for decorative arts, les arts décoratifs, and many strands were developed across the world. Its influence declined with the onset of the Second World War when the International Style came to the fore, particularly in architecture.


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The Great Breath emerged after a long association with arcane symbolism and ideas, and directly after her influential overseas travels in 1929–1930. During her travels she encountered a number of like-minded individuals who also sought to communicate their spiritual values through their work. These encounters solidified Waller’s self-identification as a spiritual emissary.

Themes that underscore The Great Breath represent the synthesis of Waller’s spiritual values. Ostensibly, each design represents one of the seven Root Races of human evolution outlined in Blavatsky’s The Secret Doctrine (1888). In it Blavatsky described “The Great Breath” as a symbol for the “one Reality” of “Abstract Motion representing Unconditioned Consciousness”. As Waller declared in the introduction to the book: “[This is] A Book of seven designs, each design a symbolic rendering of the impulse behind an individual Root Race of the present World Cycle”. However, the complex symbolism of the designs and the format of the book also demonstrate the influence of other spiritual philosophies. For this reason, I analyse the work by examining the variety of spiritual forces that underpin it and argue that Waller personally translated these concepts to develop a striking book that explored the evolution of the human soul. While McFarlane and Sarmiala-Berger have analysed the work—including each design—within the context of its Theosophical and occult symbolism, below I present my analysis drawing on my expertise regarding Waller’s broader œuvre and how The Great Breath sits within it.

Analysis of the binding and composition of The Great Breath reveals that rather than being simply an example of an ‘Art Deco’ artist’s book, it is a sophisticated work that draws together a wide range of influences to craft a spiritual narrative. It also demonstrates Waller’s engagement with the Arts and Crafts Movement, specifically William Morris’ notion of the ideal book. This influence is seen in the binding of The Great Breath [Figure 97]. The book has a gatefold [Figure 98] and is the size and format of a medieval folio, covered in green cloth with the astrological symbol of the

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545 The concept of the seven root races was an integral element of Theosophical thought. The Theosophical Society advanced the belief that humankind had evolved from its original matter-free state through a number of primitive races, and was currently in the fifth stage of that evolution, known as the Aryan race. The seventh stage would result in the perfect human being. Christian believed that she and her pet Airedales were evolving to this perfect state, and prided herself on being the youngest of seven children, given the mystical significance of that number.

Larmour, The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland, p. 3.

546 Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, abridged and annotated, p. 3.


sun—a dot in the centre of a circle—painted in gold on the upper centre of the 
cover. This signifies the personal significance of this symbol. In medieval times, it 
was common for affluent book collectors to have their coat-of-arms stamped in gold 
on the covers of their books; here Waller has engaged with this tradition by using the 
sun symbol to represent herself and the spiritual theme of the book. Further, the way 
in which she has covered the boards with fabric and used cord to bind the pages is 
also consistent with medieval bookbinding practices. 549

Figure 97: The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs, 1932, a bound book of twelve leaves with linocut text and seven linocuts tipped in, 
the three fold cover covered in green fabric, printed in black ink, each from one block, book (open) 45.0 x 76.0 cm, 57/150 (only about 30 
bound up, the numbering was not chronological but based on the numerology of the purchaser), published by Golden Arrow Press, 
Melbourne, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1976. N.B. All subsequent images of The Great Breath are from this copy.

Figure 98: Title Page and Back Endpapers (detail), from: The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs

McFarlane also identified some Arts and Crafts influences in Waller’s aims for The Great Breath and in her working manner.
McFarlane, “The Theosophical Society and Christian Waller’s the Great Breath,” p. 120.
Indeed, the binding and presentation of *The Great Breath* was designed to encourage close physical engagement. It was pamphlet-bound, using green cord, and the scale of the work means the reader has to hold it with both hands and rest it on their lap, therefore requiring bodily engagement. Waller emphasised the work’s hand-made qualities—a sign of her commitment to Arts and Crafts values—and stated on the colophon: “This edition of original lino-cuts printed and bound by the artist, is limited to one hundred and fifty copies”. As detailed in the previous chapter, she was photographed for the *Herald* newspaper to advertise the book’s publication, and the unnamed journalist reported that she planned to produce one hand-printed book a year, further indicating her intent to develop a suite of printed books to express her spiritual values. The strength of *The Great Breath* suggests that if the other books had been realised, they would have been powerful artistic statements.

While the aesthetic philosophy Waller harnessed engaged with Arts and Crafts principles, stylistically there is some influence of Art Deco in the use of dynamic, streamlined forms—especially in the first design, *The Spirit of Light*. The Art Deco movement consisted of various branches and styles, and burst onto the international stage in 1925 at the major *International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts* in Paris, France. The exhibition included a wide array of art and design, including Waller’s favoured media of graphic art and glass. When she visited Paris in 1929–30, she had the opportunity to see some impressive collections of Art Deco art that had been acquired by the French State; indeed her *Travel Sketchbook* contains a drawing [Figure 99] of François Pompon’s (1855–1933) iconic sculpture *Ours blanc* (*Polar Bear*, 1922–23) that was exhibited in the 1925 exhibition. Art Deco promoted a modernist design aesthetic that incorporated a wide range of ornamentation, materials and vibrant colours that responded to the concerns of post First World

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551 Transcribed stories Waller wrote but did not publish are located in Appendix C.
552 This included a whole pavilion devoted to the work of glass artist René Lalique (1860–1945), who—like Waller—expressively depicted hair and the human figure in his work.

War society. Its hybrid nature—which resulted in many variants—drew on a number of influences from sources as varied as the art of ancient Egypt, Eastern and Western art, the mechanical age and geometric forms, tapped into the multifarious aesthetic interests Waller’s art explored; however its concern with the vitalism of modern life and industrial materials departed from her interests.553

Some aspects of *The Great Breath* have an affinity with Art Deco, specifically book designs. Design historian Alistair Duncan contended that, at the height of the style there was a creative outpouring in the field of book design of a standard that had not been seen since the production of illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages.554 Leading artists such as François-Louis Schmied (1873–1941) were, at that time, designing, illustrating and binding exquisite books that combined medieval craftsmanship with Art Deco sensibilities.555 Given that Waller conceived the idea of creating this book directly after her European travels, she was clearly responding to ideas she encountered with overseas.

The binding of *The Great Breath* also marks a continuation of Waller’s engagement with Arts and Crafts modes of production. Her commitment to the primacy of artistic quality over commercial interests separated her engagement with the movement from her more commercially-minded contemporaries; another reason why *The Great Breath* cannot be considered an “Art Deco artist’s book”. In this way, she espoused the principles of artistic integrity advanced by Ruskin, Morris and Whall when producing *The Great Breath*. Specifically, the production of each book followed the manner of medieval book design that Morris had revived. With each book taking four days to print and assemble, the production was a labour of love for the artist.556 Her friend Harry Tatlock Miller (1913–89) assisted her in the publication and distribution of the book from his Geelong bookshop, the Book Nook; he published it under Waller’s Golden Arrow Press.557 Around thirty completed books

554 Ibid., p. 175.
555 Ibid., p. 133.
556 Waller had hoped to print *The Gates of Dawn* in this manner however, due to poor health, she instead printed a single copy lithographically and was unable to formally publish the work. In 1977, *The Gates of Dawn and The Great Breath* were published by Waller’s niece Kylie Pate for Gryphon Books, Melbourne, in an edition of 600 for each publication.
were made out of a proposed edition of 150. The images were printed with her Victorian printing press on goatskin parchment, then tipped onto cream wove paper before being bound into a folio-sized gatefold cover.

Above all, *The Great Breath* is a powerful demonstration of Waller’s commitment to creating art with a spiritual message by harnessing a wide range of mystical influences and decorative forms. The book’s prospectus—that was probably written by Waller and Tatlock Miller—emphasised this. It described the work as “an intensely imaginative interpretation of the human race” and went on to celebrate its spiritual symbolism:

The lino-cuts reveal a serenity of design, beautiful in conception and a lyric of inspired workmanship. The black and white of the medium chosen is miraculously transformed to the irridiscence [sic] of a jewel, glowing and palpitating with precious life and colour in perfect harmony with the mysticism of the theme.

Rather than emphasising the Theosophical influence, or the Art Deco sensibilities, it is the mystical theme and the capacity of the work to bring this to life that is stressed. This indicates that Waller conceived of the work as vehicle for spiritual expression that had the potential to inspire spiritual awareness, and that this is how she wanted to market it. The image on the pamphlet, that was also reproduced on a flyer [Figure 100] reinforces this, as the male figure floats in a mandorla of sunrays and holds a banner of streaming light that make him appear like a spiritual prophet.

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Every aspect of the book’s design and creation reinforces this. For example, rather than number the copies sequentially, Waller instead personally inscribed the number on the colophon [Figure 101] according to the numerology of the purchaser or recipient; which she calculated.560 The Title Page of the book [Figure 102] is also indicative of the symbolism of the seven designs and associated text. A snake weaves its way up the branches and leaves of a tree. This is followed by the Introduction [Figure 103] in which Waller outlined the seven Root Races she depicts in the designs that comprise the bulk of the book. Two images are printed alongside the text: a reclining cat-like animal and an Egyptian winged sun, symbols associated with powerful women and spiritual life respectively that were worshipped in ancient Egyptian culture.561

561 Although Waller’s depiction of the cat is highly stylised, given her interest in Egyptian symbolism and powerful women, she may be representing the Egyptian goddess Bastet, who represented femininity and fertility. Furthermore, the winged sun is clearly drawn from the winged sun of Thebes, a symbol that dates from the Old Kingdom of 26 BCE and is associated with the sun god Re, the chief god worshipped by the ancient Egyptian due to the primary role of the sun in the creation and maintenance of life. For further information about Egyptian myths and symbols see: Garry Shaw, The Egyptian Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Gods and Legends (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2014).
The first of the seven designs, *The Spirit of the Light* [Figure 104] combines abstract and geometric shapes to symbolise the transformation from the immaterial to the material. The image shows an androgynous figure as a shaft of light, intersecting a black space of spiralling bubbles that form seven rings. The zodiac symbol for Leo—Waller’s sun sign—appears top right. This print portrays the Astral Race, which she described as having “descended into the depths of Chaos”. Here she has combined her skilled use of pattern—seen in the circles of bubbles—with her masterful use of dynamic line—apparent in the vertical lines that are used to compose the figure’s body.

The second design, *The Lunar Pitris* [Figure 105], exemplifies the way in which Waller synthesised her spiritual influences to develop a mystical visual language. It represents the Hyperborean Race, and conveys the arrival of intelligence to planet earth. It includes orthodox and arcane symbols to represent spiritual devotion. It

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563 At the base of the image Waller described the Lunar Pitris as those “Who sent down the first germ of intelligence”. Ibid.
features seven androgynous figures each wearing a long robe and holding an Ankh to their chest. The inclusion of the Ankh—the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph that symbolises life—enhances the mystical theme the design. References to Christian art are also present, seen through the depiction of figures in priestly robes with halos and through the use of negative space in it evokes the habits worn by Catholic nuns.

The Lords of the Flame [Figure 106] is the third print, and it shows the Lemurian Race. Three men carry and ride flaming suns to earth. They each have a six-pointed star on their chests, and the astrological sign for Aries appears top right. In this print the symbol of the sun is conflated with that of fire, and the figures are shown both drawing energy from the fiery sun, and holding its flames. The muscular strength of the figures symbolises their power and capacity to master the elements.

The Atlantean Race is portrayed in the fourth design, The Golden Faun [Figure 107], in which a faun plays the flute while standing on a garden bed with blossoming irises. Willow leaves are in the upper right and left of the image, and a crescent moon and sun symbol appears in the upper right. In this design Waller incorporated pattern and
ornament to add a mystical quality that is seen through the depiction of a faun, a mystical beast that is half human and half animal, often associated with prophecy.564

In the next design, The Lords of Venus [Figure 108], Waller has drawn on Ancient Egyptian design to portray the Aryan Race. Four androgynous figures stand in a row, their bodies slightly overlapping. They wear long robes and each holds a precious gift, which is (from left to right): a globe with a cross, a sphinx on a box, a small temple, and an Ankh. A blazing sun occupies the background behind them, while an unnaturally-large stylised lotus emerges from a body of water. The reference to Egyptian art and spirituality is pronounced in this design, specifically in the flattened two-dimensionality of the print and anatomical feature of the Lords that suggests an influence from Egyptian tomb painting.565 The stacked feet at the base of the print and dominance of the sun motif further emphasise this influence. Interest in Ancient Egyptian design was enhanced by Art Deco, which was informed by ancient cultures.566 Her interest in it also reflects his spiritual values, and is seen from the early 1920s in the cipher she developed based on the sacred scarab beetle. The Theosophical Society, for example, advanced the beliefs and rituals of ancient and

564 Ayto, Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, s. v. “Fauna,” p. 496.
565 This had been popularised following English Egyptologist Howard Carter’s (1874-1939) discovery of the tomb of Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamen in 1922.
so-called primitive cultures, especially the Ancient Egyptians. Waller's *Travel Sketchbook*—produced at the time of her overseas travel—features notes on the Ancient Egyptian dynasties and drawings of members of the Royal Family, further highlighting her interest in Ancient Egyptian history and aesthetics [Figures 109–10].

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568 Sketchbooks that feature Egyptians hieroglyphs and a list of the Egyptian Dynasties are in the collection of the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery and the State Library Victoria respectively. Waller's interest in Ancient Egypt may also have emerged from her tuition at Whall & Whall Ltd., as Egyptian aesthetics were commonly taught to stained glass artists, given the belief that the Egyptians had invented glass.

The Shepherd of Dreams [Figure 111], the penultimate design, depicts the Sixth Race. This design portrays a shepherd with a halo holding a crook and wearing a belt with a star buckle, winged sandals and a cape. Seven birds are perched across his right arm and left shoulder. A six-pointed star radiates upper left and the Zodiac symbol for Aquarius also appears upper left. McFarlane’s assessment that this figure is inspired by Jesus Christ, combined with the Greek messenger god Hermes is pertinent. I argue that Waller’s reference to Christianity and Classical mythology is further evidence of the pantheistic nature of her spirituality.

This is continued in her depiction of The Magician of the Beautiful [Figure 112] that represents the Seventh Race in the final design and does not possess Waller’s engagement with Art Deco sensibilities seen in the previous designs. It portrays what she describes as “man perfected” in the form of an androgynous figure wearing a patterned dress and cape whilst he stands on a circle of stars. He is shown in spiritual contemplation, with his head resting to one side, whilst holding up a key with a swastika on it in his left hand and clutching an orb in his right. A radiating sun-like star sits like a halo behind the figure’s head. A woman’s head appears upper right and

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upper left, and the one on the right has no eyes. A trident is depicted centre left, and an equilateral triangle is located centre right.

The clarity of design expressed in each of the designs in *The Great Breath* makes them visually compelling and intriguing modern artworks, independent of their spiritual messages. Analysis of contemporary reviews on the book at the time of its publication confirms this. Admitting that much of the esoteric symbolism was lost on him, Blamire Young, writing for the Melbourne *Herald*, instead praised the artistic merits of the work:

The sequence of prints are superb examples of a very difficult medium, and they reflect the intensely imaginative genius of Christian Waller. Their pictorial content matches to perfection the mysticism of the theme, and the production is a monument to the artist’s inspiration.  

Young’s comments in one of the few reviews the book received when first published, highlight the artistic strength of the work and demonstrate that it was recognised at the time of the book’s publication. Waller’s personal and spiritual expression did not, therefore, detract from the artistic quality of her work.

The symbolism and style of *The Great Breath* reflects that which Waller incorporated into her stained glass from the early 1930s. The influence of Art Deco in prints designed for *The Great Breath* foreshadows design elements Waller utilised for the stained glass she produced from the mid-1930s. Comments by George Bell—champion of Australian modernism—in a review of *The Great Breath* that refer to the “stained-glass manner” of the prints, suggest critics were aware of the connection between Waller’s graphic and stained-glass art. This connection has not been pursued by scholars, despite its significance to Waller’s *œuvre*. Creating her last known print, *The Star in the East* [Figure 113]—a mystical interpretation of the Christian story of the Adoration of the

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Magi in 1935—Waller devoted herself wholly to the design and creation of stained-glass windows until her death in 1954.

Extant scholarship on Waller’s *The Great Breath* sheds light on the important place the work holds in Waller’s *œuvre*, however the analysis has located it within a wider discourse of Theosophy that neglects the artist’s broader spiritual orientation. While McFarlane, Butler, Sarmiala-Berger and Draffin have all introduced significant information, many of the influences they drew attention to have not been investigated in great detail. The following section builds on existing scholarship and presents new analysis and research on *The Great Breath* which highlights the way in which Waller synthesised her commitment to Arts and Crafts values and her engagement with the Celtic Revival into her spiritually-directed printed book.

As discussed in Chapter One, the most extensive scholarly appraisal of *The Great Breath* was undertaken in the early 1990s by McFarlane. Her analysis implied that Theosophy was the most significant influence of Waller’s didactic approach to art making when she made the book, whereas my research and analysis makes it clear that Theosophy was one of many spiritual philosophies Waller channelled into it. In addition, *The Great Breath* has received brief entries in a number of significant works on Australian printmaking and artist books.572 In some cases the designs have been reproduced, a sign of their artistic strength.573

While the artistic strength of *The Great Breath* has been singled out by scholars, influence of the Celtic Revival on the work has not yet been analysed in detail. Draffin, in his catalogue essay for the publication that accompanied the *The Art of Christian Waller* exhibition, drew a link between Waller’s interpretation of

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572 The book has been mentioned in publications on Australian women artists where authors outline its basic concepts and circumstances of its creation but give no analysis. An example is Janine Burke’s *Australian Women Artists, 1840–1940* (1980). Two prints were reproduced in the book: *The Spirit of Light* and *The Lords of Venus*. While the reference to *The Great Breath* signals Waller’s inclusion in Australian art history, Burke’s comments tell the reader very little about the work. In this book Burke observes that: “In 1932 her [Waller’s] major work *The Great Breath* was published by the Golden Arrow Press, Melbourne; these prints are laden with a complex symbolism derived from astrology and numerology...”. Further analysis of *The Great Breath* was put forward by Joan Kerr in *Heritage: The National Women’s Art Book* (1995). In her biographical sketch of Waller, Kerr links *The Great Breath* with Waller’s influential overseas trip.


573 In *Printed: Images by Australian Artists 1885–1955* (2007) Butler devotes a paragraph to *The Great Breath* in a chapter titled ‘Melbourne Manner’ where he considered the works of Christian and Napier Waller and their circle. All seven prints from *The Great Breath*, along with the opening page, are reproduced. Due to the brevity of Butler’s analysis, he does not explain how the Golden Dawn movement influenced the design of *The Great Breath*, nor are links drawn between the movement and the Celtic Revival.

Theosophical theories of human evolution and the writings of Æ, and proposed that she may have read one of his articles from *The Irish Theosophist*, “The Ascending Cycle” (1893), that included a more accessible explanation of the concept of Root Races than Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). Although Draffin’s observation shed some light on Æ’s influence on *The Great Breath* however, he was constrained by the brevity of the article and did not elaborate on this comment. In one passage, which is likely what Draffin alluded to, Æ delineated the Root Races:

> During the first three-and-a-half of these [Root Races], the ethereal humanity who appeared in the First Race gradually become material in form, and the psychic spirituality of the inner man is transformed into intellectuality. During the remaining three-and-a-half periods, there is a gradual dematerialization of form; the inner man by slow degrees rises from mere brain intellection to a more perfected spiritual consciousness.

Waller’s designs in *The Great Breath* show a personal interpretation of his comments. While her first the designs convey the transition from the ethereal into form, her last four designs retain a connection with form. Rather than engaging with abstract art to convey the evolution to “perfected spiritual consciousness” Waller drew on myth and spiritual symbols to develop figures that possess some human characteristics, yet are more like magical creatures. This further demonstrates the pantheistic nature of her spirituality.

I argue that *The Great Breath*, in addition to communicating Waller’s personal sense of the sacred, contributed to the international discourse of spiritual art which existed during the inter-war period. Following in the footsteps of the international figures involved in spiritual enquiry and the arts—which included Æ and Trinick—Waller, after her return to Australia, used her art as a vehicle to communicate her spiritual beliefs.

**Celtic Connections in Art: Waller, J. B. Trinick and Shared Spiritual and Artistic Concerns**

Waller’s contact with key figures associated with the Celtic Revival informed the spiritual direction of her œuvre around the time she produced *The Great Breath*. It

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was facilitated by friendships she had established in Australia, including Trinick. He was an important life-long friend and fellow student at the National Gallery Art School who has until now not been included in key studies on Waller. Also enrolling in the School in 1910, he soon befriended her and her future husband. Their friendship, as art historian Fiona Moore has shown, was built on shared interest and experiences. I argue that Waller and Trinick enjoyed a mutually-influential friendship that is evident in the visual synergies of some of their artworks.

Trinick shared Waller’s commitment to Arts and Crafts values of art making. A brief survey of his life and art makes this clear. He was born in Melbourne in 1890 and lived in England between 1893 and 1910, before returning to Australia and pursuing his art training. From 1919 he again lived in England, where he undertook an apprenticeship at the Morris and Co. firm in Merton Abbey, which was established by Morris. He also joined the stained glass firm of Whall and Whall Ltd., where Waller later studied. He continued his involvement there until Christopher Whall’s death in 1924.

Evidence I have discovered indicates that Waller maintained a close friendship with Trinick after he moved overseas. I have identified references to him in a book I refer to as the Waller Printmaking Record Book (c. 1923–27) in which Waller and her husband recorded the sale and gifting of their prints. This includes The Sorceress, which was printed in an edition of thirty-five. In the book, one impression of this work is put against the initials ‘J. B. T.’, which almost certainly refers to Trinick. A copy of Trinick’s macabre poem A Dead Sanctuary (1922) contains an inscription which indicates as much: “to Mervyn and Christian from their friend J. B, Trinick London, July 26th, 1922.” Indeed, the Wallers stayed with Trinick during their time studying at Whall and Whall Ltd.

577 Ibid., p. 134.
578 Ibid.
579 The whereabouts of the book, formerly in the Waller House, is unknown. I have transcribed a facsimile of the book that was made in the 1970s and is held in a private collection. The sections related to Waller’s prints are included as Appendix B of this thesis.
580 His initials also appear on pages related to prints made by Napier Waller.
581 Observed by the author during a visit to the Waller House in July 2011.
Christian Waller and Trinick shared interests in the Arts and Crafts Movement and alternative spiritual philosophies. He was deeply fascinated by the occult, flirted with Theosophy and was a member of the Golden Dawn, an offshoot of the Theosophical Society. Trinick, moreover, felt a pull to England as a spiritual homeland, given its associations with alternative spirituality. As mentioned, between 1919 and 1921, he was commissioned by Arthur Edward Waite, to design a book of the great symbols of the tarot. The original designs—now held at the British Museum in London—express Trinick’s mystical outlook and also have parallels with Waller’s art around the time she made *The Great Breath*. In the pen and ink illustration, *Design XXXII* (Figure 114), Trinick depicted a naked woman with long black hair holding wands in both hands and with a crescent moon on her forehead. She is shown looking up to a bright seven-pointed star. A piece of diaphanous fabric is woven around her body, and appears to be floating from her skin. She stands in a mandorla composed of intersecting circles which features four winged beings; to the left is a bird, to the right is a lion, while a cherubim is located above her head and a bull below her feet. Here Trinick has employed pattern to craft a mystical narrative, emphasised by the intricate linework he has used to create a

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583 Ibid., pp. 28, 55–59.
textured effect in the background, which also reinforces the otherworldly nature of the setting. Like Waller, Trinick was attempting to synthesise spiritual values into his art through symbolic decorative expression.

The artistic exchange between Waller and Trinick is evident in works they produced around the time when the Wallers stayed with Trinick in 1929–30. In c. 1930 Waller produced the Christmas greeting card *Unto Us a King is Born* [Figure 115] which draws on the Christian narrative of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child and levitating on a crescent moon. What is striking about this work is the marked development in Waller’s graphic sensibilities, notable in how she has used dynamic linework to create the effect of the light emanating from the Madonna, forming a mandorla around her. I argue that this print, which has not been analysed before, marks the transition between Waller’s earlier period of printmaking and the work she produced when she returned to Australia in 1930. A similar interpretation of the narrative is seen in the design for a mural *Our Lady of Mount Carmel* [Figure 116] that Trinick made around this time. Here Trinick has also used strong lines to emphasise the mystical nature of the narrative. Due to the lack of primary material related to the creation of these works, it is unclear which one came first and whether the artists consciously developed similar works while they were under the same roof. However, based on their friendship and shared interests these, works can be viewed as the manifestation of their friendship and as representations of mutual influence.
Celtic Connections in Literature

*The Great Breath* also marks a significant leap forward in Waller’s engagement with book arts and storytelling. Throughout her period of activity she brought written narratives to life through her art. As examined in the previous chapter, she produced illustrations for books: *The Great Breath* was her first foray into designing, writing and publishing a book. Although the overarching theme was drawn from the Theosophical concept of Root Races, Waller incorporated influences from Celtic Revival writers, most notably Æ.

The themes and imagery within her work signal a correlation between the visual arts, literature, and alternative spiritual enquiry, a connection that explains why Waller had read a great number of Æ’s works, and sought him out during her travels. The mystical poet, painter and seer was an important individual associated with the Celtic Revival. He was at the vanguard of Irish Symbolism and mystical enquiry. Æ was born in the Irish County of Armagh (now part of Northern Ireland) in 1867 and began experiencing visions as a teenager. Writing under the pseudonym ‘Æ’, after the Gnostic term ‘Æon’, his role as an essayist and mentor soon eclipsed that of his artistic pursuits. His art and poetry, which are indebted to the Symbolist movement, express his dream-like visions of folkloric beings and environs.

Like Yeats’, Æ’s poetry and writing explored mystical subjects. Waller read and responded to Æ’s work. Klytie Pate observed in a 1992 interview that her aunt “was very taken with the Irish poets and writers Æ and Yeats and Lord Dunsany”. After little success as an artist, Æ turned his attention towards social activism, poetry and essay writing. He became a leading figure in the Irish Theosophical society in the 1890s, and promoted the arts as a powerful means of communicating the Society’s spiritual philosophy, and contributed regularly to *The Irish Theosophist* before leaving.

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585 He was noted for unorthodox painting methods: painting directly onto the canvas from his mind’s eye, showing little interest in accepted standards of fine art.
Kuch, Yeats and Æ, p. 1.
586 A printer’s error meant that Russell’s pseudonym was listed as ‘Æ’ rather than ‘ÆON’, something which he embraced for the rest of his career.
587 Pate, “Klytie Pate Interviewed by James Murdoch.”
the Society in 1898. Long after his association with Theosophy ended, Æ’s writings concerning spiritual evolution were cited in the Society’s publications, as sign of their broad relevance. For example, in February 1925 a quote from *The Candle of Vision* (1918) was published in the *Melbourne Lodge Magazine*, which Waller may have read: “we have within us the light of the world… and nature the genii is the slave of the lamp and must fashion life about us as we fashion it within ourselves”. As this statement suggests, like Waller, he developed a personal sense of the spiritual that was informed by Christianity, Theosophy, his Celtic heritage as well as a wide range of spiritual philosophies, and channelled this into his art and writing.

Waller, who was engaged with alternative spiritual enquiry around this time and possessed a prolonged interest in the Celtic world and its Revival, responded to Æ as a figure who drew together these spheres of interest. Indeed, the connection between the Celtic revival and alternative spiritual philosophies during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries—including Theosophy and the Golden Dawn—is striking. As a leading seer in Ireland, Æ played a key role synthesising the spiritual, artistic and cultural currents. It is worth quoting Æ scholars Raghavan Iyer and Nandidni Iyer at length, as their observations offer a useful context for understanding his importance as a conduit between the arts and spiritual enquiry:

> He helped to infuse a spirit of brotherhood into the emerging polity, holding that Ireland could accomplish a far-reaching spiritual renaissance by returning to its ancestral roots. To this end he fostered the revival of interest in Celtic mythology and folklore and constructed the native heroism of the ancient Gaelic people with the feudal servitude imposed upon them by the Christian Church. His message was unambiguous: Ireland could build a future only on the foundations of its pre-Christian past.

Although not Irish herself, Waller’s extensive collection of Æ’s books, and references to his writings that I have identified in her *Journal and Book of Stories*, together with the themes of her art, indicate that she responded to Æ’s call for a banding together of society in an effort to foster a spiritual renaissance. Her Celtic heritage no doubt solidified her engagement with his efforts to enhance spiritual awareness through the arts.

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Waller’s interest in Æ’s writings likely emerged through her attraction to Celtic mythology and alternative spiritual practices. This influence is expressed in her art of the 1920s and 1930s. Blavatsky, as McFarlane contended, promoted Irish traditions as offering spiritual insight. This Celtic connection may account for Waller’s initial attraction to Theosophy and subsequently to other spiritual philosophies, given her œuvre is populated with references to Celtic and medieval imagery, which first appeared prior to her engagement with Theosophy. As she explored this spiritual philosophy, she continued to engage with Celtic narratives, including the legend of King Arthur and Morgan le Fay. This figure, the half-sister of King Arthur was the subject of both a 1922 watercolour and 1927 print by Waller, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Morgan le Fay has strong links with Irish mythology, as well as the legend of King Arthur, signalling another point of intersection between Waller’s medieval and Celtic interests. Waller, I argue, sought direct experience with the Celtic regions of Ireland and Cornwall to complement her already strong interest in Celtic and medieval myths and legends that had undergone a resurgence of interest through the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival. As discussed in the previous chapter, Waller had personal ties to Celtic lands. Prior to their immigration to Australia in the 1850s, her father’s family was living in the English region of Cornwall, one of the six Celtic nations. The North of Cornwall, which borders the Irish Sea between the Celtic nations of Wales and Ireland, is considered in Celtic mythology to have been the birthplace of King Arthur. Through these and other connections, Cornwall has associations with witchcraft, mysticism and the occult. Notably, guidebooks, and other ephemera located in the Waller House, signal that Christian and Napier Waller visited mystical sites in Cornwall and also throughout Ireland during their travels in 1929–30. Specifically, they reveal she visited Tintagel, King Arthur’s birthplace. (This point is expanded upon in the next chapter.)

See: La Scala, “Inventory—Napier Waller Library—9 Crown Road Ivanhoe.”
Through his prominent position in Irish spiritual and cultural life, Æ also played an important mentoring role in the lives and careers of fellow Irish artists who responded to spiritual and mystical enquiry. Æ believed in two great truths:

first of all, that creative gifts should be used in the service of one’s fellow-men; and secondly, that one’s true mission in life must not be dictated by personal ambition but should assist the purposes for which the psyche had taken on incarnation. 594

These “great truths” could be equally applied to Waller as to Æ. Reiterating the remarks she made in 1948 demonstrates this:

There are two words printed on my consciousness... Work and God.
Everything else must come secondary... My life is to get the message through, and I am trying to make religion real. 595

Waller’s articulation of her mission highlights strong parallels between her agenda as a self-appointed spiritual emissary and that of Æ. This adds further weight to my argument that Æ encouraged Waller on her quest to inspire and educate her audience about her spiritual beliefs through her art.

Indeed, Æ’s role as a mentor for emerging artists encompassed those working in the applied and decorative arts. This included the artists associated with the progressive An Túr Gloine stained glass co-operative, that promoted traditional Irish imagery and Arts and Crafts values. It was established by the British portraitist Sarah Purser (1848–1943) with the assistance of Christopher Whall’s favourite pupil Alfred E. Child (1875–1939), who went to Ireland after Whall declined the offer to setup the co-operative and train a new generation of Irish artists in stained glass. 596 McFarlane drew attention to the fact that Æ was one of the principal shareholders. 597 I have confirmed this by analysing the co-operative’s record books at the National Gallery of Ireland. The record books also reveal that Æ was involved in the ongoing management and upkeep of An Túr Gloine. 598 In a newspaper article published

598 Observed by the Author in April 2012.
599 Ibid.
shortly after Waller’s return to Australia, Purser is mentioned as one of the individuals whom she met while in Ireland.\(^{599}\)

Although Irish art of the Celtic Revival had been superseded by interests in modern movements that favoured quasi-abstract and post-impressionist art by the time Waller visited Ireland in 1929, she nonetheless found adequate inspiration during her travels. In a newspaper article published shortly after her return to Australia, Waller is quoted as having visited the An Túr Gloine studios.\(^{600}\) Waller observed that she was “overwhelmed by the beauty of the Irish glass,” adding that “It seems to express the old wonderful golden spirit of the Ireland that you read of in the remote past. It is beautiful in colour, line, and feeling.”\(^{601}\) Further, she mentioned both the links to Ireland’s ancient past, and also the importance of “feeling” in the overall effect of the stained-glass window. This observation reveals much about her views on stained glass, as it suggests she considered it a medium to be experienced, rather than one that was simply viewed.

A number of women artists exploring arcane ideas received encouragement from Æ. British-American Pamela Colman-Smith (1878–1951) was one such artist who worked closely with Æ, receiving his encouragement to pursue her interests in art and spiritual enquiry.\(^{602}\) Colman-Smith’s greatest legacy is the Tarot deck she designed with Waite in 1909, which has come to be considered the quintessential tarot deck. Waite was a leading figure in the occult scene of Dublin in the 1890s, and was particularly associated with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, as was Colman-Smith.\(^{603}\)

This connection has particular relevance for a study on Waller given that, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Waite went on to collaborate on a tarot deck with the Australian stained glass artist John Trinick in 1923. It indicates that Waller’s circle included individuals such as Trinick, who were also interested in exploring esoteric ideas through their art. Moreover, as Sarmiala-Berger has argued, Waller’s \textit{œuvre} expressed an awareness of the esoteric symbolism featured in the Tarot.\(^{604}\)

\(^{599}\) “Cathedral Windows,” Argus 22 March 1930, p. 28.
\(^{600}\) Ibid.
\(^{601}\) Ibid.
text in the border of designs for *The Great Breath*, together with the symbolism in the prints, clearly demonstrates her awareness of the Tarot. Given her immersion in astrology and numerology—occult pursuits Waller practised, described by her niece Pate as having cast horoscope readings for friends—it is therefore logical to assume Waller’s interest in the Tarot included a belief in the practical application of the cards. 605 This influence is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Also amongst Æ’s circle was Beatrice Elvery (1883–1970), a talented artist who explored spiritual and mystical interests and produced art with stylistic parallels to Waller’s. Trained by prominent Irish artist William Orpen (1878–1931), Elvery’s practice involved stained glass, illustration and painting. In 1913 she provided illustrations for the book *Heroes of the Dawn* by Violet Russell (Æ’s wife). 606 The book is composed of stories from Celtic mythology retold for children. Elvery’s illustrations express shared aesthetic sensibilities to Waller; in particular her image of the harp [Figure 117] has similarities to those Waller produced for her children’s book *The Gates of Dawn*.

Waller may have been exposed to this book during her travels. However, a number of books owned by her signal wide reading of Celtic narratives such as those featured in Russell’s *Heroes of the Dawn*. Furthermore, the title—which refers to the concept of dawn as a symbol for spiritual enlightenment—is similar to that of *The Gates of Dawn*.

Around the time Waller produced *The Great Breath*, she also began writing and illustrating an unpublished story (c. 1930–32) that expresses the legacy of Celtic Revival, of which fairy stories and mythological narratives were a major means through which Celtic literature was revived. Only one doubled-sided sheet with the first page and an illustration from this story survive [Figures 118–19], suggesting it was unfinished. These pages nonetheless offer insight into the creative inspiration Waller drew from Celtic literature. The narrative describes a house filled with numerous cushions of many colours. The cushions are personified: they are sad; they

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605 Pate, “Klytie Pate Interviewed by James Murdoch.”
do not have a lady to sit on them and love back in return. When a “strange lady” comes one day, they immediately love her, and follow her across countryside to the “Hills of Faery” (surely an allusion to Fairy Hills), where they remain. As Pate observed, Waller had a talent for such narratives: “she was so immersed in it all [literature of the Celtic Revival] that she could make it all come to life.” Pate’s use of the word ‘immersed’ offers insight into the degree to which the Celtic Revival shaped Waller’s spiritual thinking and, by extension, her art making.

While it is clear Waller shared some of Æ’s interests and those of the artistic circle he fostered, it was his poetry, fiction and prose that were the most salient influences on her art practice. *The Great Breath* is run through with references to Æ’s esoteric poetry that synthesise Celtic myths with Theosophical and other alternative spiritual philosophies. These influences, it must be said, were themselves Æ’s response to a wide range of orthodox and occult spiritual philosophies though which he developed a spiritual worldview rooted in his patriotism towards the Irish. The second edition of Æ’s *Collected Poems* (1926), a copy of which Waller possessed, was a significant influence on *The Great Breath*. The imagery in an early poem in the collection, also titled *The Great Breath*, evokes the atmosphere of Waller’s book of seven designs. Æ refers to the “trembling ages past” as moulded by the beautiful and captivating Great Breath. This personification of breath as a powerful and everlasting force, which

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607 Pate, “Klytie Pate Interviewed by James Murdoch.”
has both withstood and shaped previous lives, corresponds to the overall theme of Waller’s *The Great Breath*: the physical and spiritual evolution of mankind:

there is at first one divine Substance-Principle, Flame, Motion or the Great Breath; from this emanate the elements Akasa, ether, fire, air water and earth; the spiritual quality becoming gradually lessened in these as they are further removed from their divine source; this is the descent into matter, the lowest rung of manifestation.⁶⁰⁹

Here Æ indicates that the spiritual potency of “the Great Breath” is strongest at the closest proximity to the “divine source”. He also links the elements with physical manifestation of the spiritual force.

*A Vision of Beauty* is another of Æ’s poems, which encapsulates a range of themes and symbols in Waller’s *The Great Breath*. Referring to lightning, a bed of stars, fire, and the souls of the earth, this lengthy poem alludes to similar spiritual ideas Waller expressed in her work. The series of lines towards the end of the poem are particularly revealing of this shared spiritual interest:

In a radiant tumult thronging, suns and stars and myriad races
Mount the spirit spires of beauty, reaching onward to the day
When the Shepherd of the Ages draws his misty hordes away⁶¹⁰

The solar imagery suggested by the first line has parallels with the recurrent motifs of the sun, moon and stars in *The Great Breath*. This is seen in *The Shepherd of Dreams*, *The Golden Faun* and *The Magician of the Beautiful* respectively. The cluttered imagery in these lines presents the Vision of Beauty as attracting these solar phenomena. There is a ominous quality to this appeal, with the Shepherd symbolically steering his flock away from this dangerous temptation. Waller’s representation of the shepherd in *The Shepherd of Dreams* has similarities to Æ’s, in that she also presents the Shepherd as a nurturing figure who protects his followers from evil, signified by the line at the base of the print describing him as one “who lightens the pathway forever calling come”⁶¹¹ Given these shared symbols and the fact Waller owned a number of Æ’s books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, it is apparent that she drew inspiration for *The Great Breath* from the Irishman’s writing. Her interest in Æ’s work was something she was exposed to through her creative network in Australia, which also encompassed engagement with the Celtic Revival through music.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.
Celtic Connections in Music: Fritz Hart

Waller’s deep interest in Æ’s poetry was shared by her friend, composer Fritz Hart. Music was an art form that inspired Waller’s creative undertaking, yet this has not been examined by other writers beyond a passing reference to her friendship and collaboration with Hart. Her relationship with Hart attests to the way in which Waller explored her artistic and spiritual values—including those related to the Celtic Revival—across a range of art forms.

Waller most likely met Hart through their involvement in the Melbourne art scene of the early twentieth century and their shared interests in the Celtic Revival and the Theosophical Society. Although the exact date when the friendship began is unknown, they may have become acquainted early in the 1920s when Hart worked as Director of the Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne, as his office was in the Victorian Artists’ Society (VAS) building in East Melbourne, and he befriended a number of artists involved with the organisation. At this time Napier Waller was one of the VAS board members, and Christian Waller exhibited regularly in the seasonal exhibitions staged by the Society. Hart also lived near the couple in Ivanhoe, as did Norman Macgeorge (1872–1952), also a member of the VAS board.

Like Waller, Hart had strong ties to both the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival. Prior to his arrival in Australia in 1908, he lived in his native England. Proud of his Cornish origins, his identification with the Celtic and English medieval worlds ran through his music and personal life. While studying music in London in the 1890s, he discovered the writing of Ruskin. Hart also joined the Hammersmith Socialist Society, which held meetings at Kelmscott House. The House was owned by Morris and espoused his principles of Arts and Crafts art and design. Despite the fact Hart did not meet Morris in person, the influence of the leading figure was, as Tregear argued, long-lasting, particular his Socialist views concerning the

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614 Ibid.
democratisation of the arts. Although Tregear’s meaning here is unclear, he likely refers to Morris’ Kelmscott Press, which published the medieval and Celtic stories which Hart valued.

As with Trinick, Waller shared Hart’s interest in spirituality and the arts. His professional and private interests point to an engagement with alternative spirituality. He was a member of the Theosophical Society in Melbourne. From 1918, Hart corresponded regularly with Æ, after the Irishman became aware that Hart had set some of his poetry to music. In 1931 Hart contributed the article “Five Poets and Myself”, to the inaugural edition of the Geelong-based art journal Manuscripts: The Book Nook Miscellany that was founded and edited by Tatlock Miller in 1931. (An essay by Waller was also included in the debut issue.) Hart’s article offers some insight into his interest in Æ’s poetry. In it, Hart discussed how certain poets and their work speak to him, and compel him to set them to music. After stumbling upon a collection of Æ’s poetry, and reading it some years later, Hart observed: “[I] opened the book at random, and immediately began setting the first poem that met my eye”. Hart went on to set fifty of Russell’s poems to music, and corresponded with the Irishman until his death in 1935, visiting him in both 1919 and 1929–30.

Waller owned copies of the poetry by authors Hart listed as influences which indicates she and Hart shared an interest in the Celtic Revival and in spiritual enquiry that was not widely embraced by the Australian arts scene in the early-twentieth century. Indeed, given his strong interest in the writings of Æ, and friendship with individuals like the Wallers, and the English composers Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) and Gustav Holst (1874–1934), it is reasonable to suggest Hart had an interest in the arcane mystical ideas explored in Æ’s poetry, as much as their Celtic connections. The number of works and volumes of Hart’s settings of Æ’s poems is also significant. With “seven books of seven songs in each book”, the series has an affinity with Waller’s The Great Breath.

617 Letters from Æ are located in Hart’s papers at the National Library of Australia, Canberra.
620 Ibid.
In view of the above, Hart was likely a conduit between Waller and Æ. From the 1920s, the composer corresponded regularly with the Irish writer and statesman. In his papers at the National Library of Australia there is reference to an occasion when he wrote a letter of introduction for a young woman who travelled to Ireland to meet Æ.621 Given Waller’s interest in Æ’s writings, it is logical that Hart did the same for her. Like Waller and Æ, he considered that artists possessed the capacity to access higher truths, as he explained to his wife in 1935:

I am convinced that the creative artist knows more than the rest of humanity… Probably this world is ‘Maya’—illusion; but if so, the reality behind it is a fact more glorious than we can conceive of.622

This conviction may explain his attraction to Æ’s writings and also his collaborative relationship with Waller. As well as setting a number of Æ’s poems to music, he did the same with works by other figures of the Celtic Revival, including John Millington Synge (1871–1909), Lady Gregory (1852–1932) and Yeats.623 As mentioned, Yeats, like Trinick, was a member of the Order of the Golden Dawn, and also commissioned Colman Smith to illustrate his mystical poetry.

In 1932 Waller designed and printed linocut bookplates for Hart and his son Basil [Figures 120–21], a sign of their closeness as she only made bookplates for close friends and family. Waller’s interest in bookplates emerged concurrently with a number of modern Australian artists, yet, as with her narrative prints, the dozen bookplates she produced between 1926 and 1932 had little in common with those of her contemporaries. Collectors John Lane Mullins (1857–1939) and Percy Neville Barnett (1881–1953) encouraged the rise of printed bookplates in the 1920s and 1930s, inspiring a number of artists to experiment with the medium. The first exhibition devoted to the art form in Australia was held at Tyrrell’s Gallery, Sydney, in May 1923. Following this successful exhibition, the Australian Ex Libris Society was formed, attracting a number of modern artists—including Thake, Feint, Gayfield Shaw (1885–1961) and George Perrottet (1890–1971). In contrast to these artists, Waller did not exhibit or sell her bookplates, nor is it likely that she accepted commissions for them. Rather, she made them for her own personal enjoyment, and gifted them to friends and family members, like Hart.

The symbolic potential of bookplates was particularly appealing to Waller, and this is seen in Ex Libris: Fritz Hart. Printed bookplates have—since being developed in sixteenth century Germany—been considered an “esoteric medium”. This view emerged, in some ways, from the incorporation of heraldic motifs as opposed to literal images. Waller’s bookplates—particularly those produced in 1932—reflect the

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624 Bookplates are also known as ex libris, which is Latin for “from the bookplate of”. Waller sometimes included this phrase on her bookplates.


626 In the exhibition catalogue suggests otherwise. There she is described by A. G. Stephens as simply “the wife of M. Napier Waller” in contrast with other exhibitors whose biography was given.

627 A. G. Stephens, Woodcuts (Sydney: Tyrrell’s Limited, 1923), unpaginated.

628 Feint and Shaw acquired prints from the Waller’s, as detailed in the Waller Printmaking Record Book. See Appendix B for more information.


630 Waller’s bookplates are not included in the Waller Printmaking Record Book and each of the people for whom she designed bookplates were friends or family members.

medium’s esoteric potential and feature ancient Egyptian and Celtic symbols to represent the subjects and also express Waller’s artistic and spiritual values.

In her bookplate, Fritz Hart (1932), Waller celebrated Hart’s admiration for Celtic mythology. It features Hart in profile, wearing armour and holding a shield that features Celtic ornament, characterised by interlaced linear forms. In the background a flock of swans fly over a bed of water, the latter represented by zigzagged lines. Waller’s incorporation of swans symbolises Hart’s Celtic ancestry: the birds are important animals in Celtic mythology, and were referenced in Yeats’ iconic poem The Wild Swans at Coole (1919). This treatment contrasts with that of other Australian bookplate designers, who, in most cases, referred to the modern world of industry and urban life in their bookplates. Thake was a leading practitioner of this style, with his caricature-style bookplate for Barnett [Figure 12], an example of the common themes of modern Australian bookplates. Waller’s bookplates, like the one she made for Hart, by contrast, are marked by their synthesis of esoteric symbols and decorative forms and differ from those produced in Australia at that time; except for those made by her husband.

Waller and Hart’s shared interests in the Celtic Revival, Theosophy and the arts led them to collaborate. Tallis’ diary mentioned their collaborative plans in his diary, observed that “Mrs Waller intends to work with him in illustrating the story to Hart's [his] new opera” and added that “she is looking forward to receive [sic] his manuscript at Fremantle”.

Elsewhere in the diary, Tallis detailed one of his many conversations with the Waller, observing that “as usual, we talked about operas and staging”.

Waller collaborated with Hart on several of his Celtic-themed operas. In 1929, she designed the costumes for The Woman Who Laughed at Faery, while her husband Napier Waller designed the sets.

Only a black and white newspaper clipping survives showing a scene from the play [Figure 123], but not the fairy costumes. Neither these nor the backdrop remains, a symptom of the fact that theatre arts have traditionally been viewed as inferior to other forms of visual

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630 Tallis then went on to comment that Hart introduced him to the Wallers before their departure on the Otranto.

631 Ibid., 14 March 1929.

Waller continued to collaborate with Hart on his Celtic-themed operas. Pate recalls that “Fritz Hart... was one of the people who came to the [Waller] house and she made posters for his operas”.\footnote{Pate's comments suggest that the Wallers designed other posters for Hart's operas.} In 1931 Waller designed and printed a poster for two of Hart’s operas, \textit{St George and The Dragon} and \textit{Pierrette} [Figure 124]. The linocut was printed in black from one block, with hand-coloured red highlights. The striking poster is an excellent example of how Waller skilfully used pattern and symbolism to make a striking print that, in this instance, conveyed the themes of Hart’s operas. St George appears in profile at the bottom left of the composition, his sword pointed towards the dragon opposite him. Waller employed strong line work in her treatment of St George’s head, hair and armour; this contrasts with the sequence of circles she used to reference his chainmail. Diagonally opposite St George, at the top right of the poster, is a ballerina, wrapped in a long floral garland. The operas were performed at the Playhouse, Melbourne in September of that year.\footnote{See: Anita Callaway, \textit{Visual Ephemera: Theatrical Art in Nineteenth-Century Australia} (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000), pp. ix–xi.}
Hart, for his part, was attracted to themes explored by these writers because of his self-identification with Celtic culture. Tregear contends the composer often boasted of his Celtic heritage. Yet, the Celtic Revival does not appear to have had a major influence on the arts in Australia beyond people like Hart, Waller and the poet Bernard O’Dowd. Like Waller, Hart and O’Dowd remain similarly peripheral figures in histories of music and literature, despite boasting significant profiles during the inter-war period.

Waller and O’Dowd also crossed paths professionally, a further sign of her engagement with like-minded individuals. Raised by migrants from the Irish Province of Ulster—coincidentally, the birthplace of Æ)—O’Dowd grew up in a family that was “preoccupied with Irish legend and Celtic ancestry”. Theosophical ideas informed some of his writings. It is not a coincidence that Waller designed the cover illustration and contributed decorative embellishments to Birth: A Little Journal of Poetry, from the 1921 edition. The journal was edited by O’Dowd, a figure with strong personal and artistic ties to the modest Celtic Revival in Australia. This is further evidence of her participation in a creative circle that embraced a wide range of spiritual philosophies, including those associated with the Celtic Revival.

Conclusion

Waller’s linocut prints were influenced artistically and ideologically by the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival. This included the printed book, The Great Breath, which was a key work in her quest to communicate spiritual ‘truths’ through art and literature. In this quest, she was part of the international transmission of ideas that had its roots in late nineteenth and early-twentieth century British and Irish art, design and literature and philosophies of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival. In this chapter I have pieced together the circumstances that impelled Waller to pursue both relief printmaking and her Arts and Crafts and Celtic Revival

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639 Ibid.
640 McFarlane, “The Theosophical Society and Christian Waller’s the Great Breath,” p. 120.
interests. In so doing, I reposition Waller within an international discourse of shared aesthetic and spiritual concerns, rather than framing the work within a specific Australian context. The influences of art, literature and music have been analysed, as has the significance of several key British and Irish artists, most notably AE.

*The Great Breath* exemplifies the way in which Waller sought to unify art movements and spiritual ideas within her art. Analysis of *The Great Breath* highlights the work of one artist whose work includes imagery and symbolism that—although influenced by—did not conform to dominant styles of art making during her period of activity, yet contributed to a broader international discourse of spiritual art. The following chapter will move to analyse the Arts and Crafts influence of Waller’s ecclesiastical stained glass.
Chapter Five

“There is an Opening to Fill, Not a Picture to Make”\textsuperscript{642}: Waller’s Arts and Crafts Approach to the Art of Stained Glass

\textsuperscript{642} Waller, “A Stained-Glass Window,” p. 28.
In the previous chapter I examined how Christian Waller harnessed Arts and Crafts values and drew inspiration from the Celtic Revival to create symbolic relief prints, focusing on her printed book *The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs* (1932). My focus now turns to Waller’s Arts and Crafts approach to the art of ecclesiastical stained glass. I argue that the artistic strength of her stained-glass windows emerged from her personal interpretation of the values of the late-nineteenth-century British Arts and Crafts Movement in regards to the medium, combined with her commitment to produce art that encouraged spiritual contemplation. Waller’s journey towards becoming an independent artist in stained glass is critically assessed. My research has revealed links between the various phases in her career as an artist, and positions ecclesiastical stained glass as the medium through which she successfully synthesised her commitment to Arts and Crafts values with her drive to combine monumental art with the spiritual.

In this chapter, the legacy of the Arts and Crafts Movement on Waller’s approach to stained glass is brought into focus. This includes the theories of stained-glass production advanced by Britain’s leading exponent of Arts and Crafts stained glass, Christopher Whall (1849–1924) and his daughter and protégé Veronica Whall (1887–1967). The Melbourne stained glass scene of the first third of the twentieth century is also examined in the context of Waller’s practice. Through analysis of new evidence unearthed in private and public collections—including artworks and correspondence—I evaluate the mentorship Waller received from eminent Melbourne stained glass artist William Montgomery and the collaborative work she completed with ecclesiastical architect Louis R. Williams (1890–1980). Williams and Montgomery each upheld Arts and Crafts values, to varying degrees, which also informed Waller’s approach to the art of stained glass.

I then move to establish how and why Waller embraced four key Arts and Crafts values when conceiving, designing and making her ecclesiastical stained-glass windows. These are: truth to materials (focusing on her technique and use of colour), truth to nature (which encompasses the role of stained glass as a modulator of natural light), the independence of the practitioner, and, truth to architecture. Waller harnessed these values to create ecclesiastical stained glass of the highest artistic standard that also served a powerful spiritual function.
From the Gothic Revival to the Arts and Crafts Movement: The Legacy of Nineteenth-Century British and Australian Stained Glass on Waller’s Art Practice

Ecclesiastical stained glass was at the centre of the Gothic Revival (c. 1740s–1900) and Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain, and influenced the stained glass scene in the Australian colony (later state) of Victoria, which commenced in the 1870s and boomed in the 1880s. When Waller began working in the medium in the 1920s, the industry was still in a state of recovery from the economic depression of the 1890s. While the situation improved after the First World War, the Great Depression of the 1930s resulted in very little stained glass being produced in that period, with the exception of the best artists—including Waller—who bucked the trend. Despite the challenges faced by the local industry, Waller embraced an Arts and Crafts approach to stained glass, which was informed by the Gothic Revival as well as by the culture of revivalism that thrived in Britain during the 1800s. Essentially, the Arts and Crafts ethos promoted the importance of truth to materials, engagement with the natural world (including natural light), the practitioner’s mastery of each and every aspect of the design and execution of the window, and conception of the window with its architectural setting in mind.

Comments Waller made about the history of ecclesiastical stained glass highlight the value she placed on artistic traditions, specifically of the pre-industrial age. When interviewed for the Women’s Section of the Melbourne newspaper the Argus in 1948, Waller described it as a “primitive art”. She observed that stained glass “has come down to us from the thirteenth century almost unaltered”. The significance she placed on traditions of craftsmanship. The choice of the words “almost unaltered” indicates a reverence for medieval working methods, implying they are superior to modern methods because they have not been modified by modern technology. Waller sought out the finest examples of medieval stained glass during her travels in Great Britain, Europe and Ireland in 1920–30, including: York Minster (1338–1408),

York, England; Canterbury Cathedral, Canterbury (1070–1834), England; and Chartres Cathedral (1194–1250), Chartres, France.  

What Waller does not mention is that traditional methods were altered during the period between the Gothic period and the Gothic Revival. This omission reflects her indifference to Renaissance stained glass and its legacy produced between c. 1400s–1800s. The medieval methods of stained glass production were ‘lost’ during the Renaissance, meaning that the so-called ‘stained glass’ produced between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries was not made with the same medieval understanding of how stained glass worked by modulating light.

By contrast, the ‘lost’ medieval practices that Waller praised, privileged the quality of materials, drew on symbols from nature and harmonised with the architectural environment, which was most frequently a place of Christian worship. Medieval craftspeople made stained glass using pot-metal coloured glass and then applied special paint (usually a compound of ground flux and other earth chemicals, resulting in black, grey and brown shades of ‘lead’) and—from the thirteenth or fourteenth century—silver stain—which gave the medium its name—to decorate the glass in yellow. In medieval windows, lead played a key role in the composition, and practitioners used smaller pieces of glass in their designs. This technique—known as the mosaic technique—emphasised the importance of design, not simply pictorial representation.

Traditional medieval methods of stained glass were revived in Britain in the nineteenth century. In that century, as I have noted, a number of ideological and aesthetic movements emerged in reaction to the Industrial Revolution and the dramatic encroachment of machines on areas of art, craft and design. This was most pronounced in England, the leading industrial nation, whose design industry was

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645 Waller’s friend John ‘Jack’ Tallis detailed visits to churches with medieval stained glass. Waller also referred to seeking out medieval glass in a newspaper article when she returned to Australia.


646 Given that this covers a period prior to the introduction of stained glass to Australia, Waller may well have been unfamiliar with Renaissance stained glass. She does not appear to have sought it out during her overseas travels.

647 As stained glass historian Virginia Raguin noted, artists did not always produce work using the finest materials, nor did they respond to the unique characteristics of stained glass; instead, the art form was approached in a similar manner to easel painting, with images painted on the surface, rather than an appreciation of the medium and its capacity to act as a modulator of light with light coming through the images painted on the glass.


648 Ibid.
particularly affected. In response, the Gothic Revival, like later movements, called for a return to integrity in the fine and decorative arts.649

The Gothic Revival, led by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–52), informed the Arts and Crafts approach to stained glass.650 In his 1836 treatise *Contrasts: Or, A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day. Shewing the Present Decay of Taste* he criticised what he calls the “degraded state of ecclesiastical buildings” in Britain, and linked this decline to the disunity between the form and the function of church architecture and design.651 He cited medieval cathedrals as the ideal antithesis to this: “when these gigantic churches were erected, each portion of them was destined for a particular use, to which their arrangement and decoration perfectly corresponded”.652 Pugin favoured red, blue and clear glass that was crafted to closely resemble the quality of medieval glass, as opposed to the later Arts and Crafts approach of promoting the artist’s individual expression through the incorporation of a wide spectrum of coloured glass.653 Although his stained glass has little in common stylistically with Waller’s, it is essential to understand his role in the revival of stained glass to appreciate the evolution of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

A number of influential figures joined Pugin in advocating for a revival of medieval methods of stained glass. These included stained-glass artist Francis William Oliphant (1818–59), who called for the medieval processes regarding the creation of stained glass to be reinstated.654 Another was Charles Winston (1814–64) who, also

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650 Interest in the Gothic movement had been brought about by the pressures of the Revolution, a rejection of which was symbolised by the new Palace of Westminster, London, rebuilt after a fire in 1834, resulting in a central showcase for the merits of Gothic design, including stained glass. Pugin was engaged by Charles Barry, who won the 1835 competition to redesign the Palace at Westminster. Stanley A. Shepherd, *The Stained Glass of A. W. N. Pugin* (Reading: Spire Books, 2009), pp. 14, 50.


652 The True Principals of Pointed or Christian Architecture: Set Forth in Two Lectures Delivered Art St Marie’s, Oscott (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), p. 56.


654 His comments reveal his disdain for what he saw as the decline in the quality of stained glass as a result of poor training: “The laws for the successful execution of Stained Glass Windows have become obsolete, and no enlarged and expanded code has as yet appeared to replace them”. He reinforced these values through his teaching position at the Government School of Design in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, the school where Montgomery later studied. However, Oliphant was no longer teaching when Montgomery attended the school in 1839. Hughes, “Designing Stained Glass for Australia 1887–1927: The Art and Professional Life of William Montgomery,” p. 15; Francis William Oliphant, *A Plea for Painted Glass: Being an Inquiry into Its Nature, Character, Objects, and Its Claims as an Art* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1839).
advocated for a revival of medieval stained-glass practices. Winston praised the merits of the Gothic mosaic method of stained glass in preference to the enamel and mosaic enamel methods of the Renaissance and argued that modern glass should live up to its quality. Art historian A. Charles Sewter has observed that Winston’s treatise signalled the dawn of a new era in stained glass manufacture. Its influence on Whall and, almost a century later, on Waller, signals the significance of the work.

The Arts and Crafts Movement was pioneered by Ruskin and Morris, along with Burne-Jones. As the most influential critic of the Victorian Age, Ruskin’s promotion of Gothic architecture—especially ecclesiastical architecture—and stained glass as art forms had a major influence on the Arts and Crafts Movement in stained glass. In “The Nature of the Gothic”, an influential chapter from his book *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53), he outlined the six essential characteristics of the Gothic. The philosophy he expressed in the chapter is a progenitor of key Arts and Crafts values, including truth to nature and the importance of the artist’s independent vision.

The Arts and Crafts approach to stained glass rejected attempts to mimic medieval windows, despite sharing many of the values of the Gothic Revival. As already discussed, Morris laid the foundations for the Movement through the establishment of his firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1861. While Morris and Burne-

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655 He argued that glass produced from the mid-sixteenth century through to the nineteenth century “exhibits the gradual decline of the art of glass painting from the excellence it attained in the first half of the sixteenth century...”. Charles Winston, *An Inquiry into the Difference of Style Observable in Ancient Glass Painting*, vol. 1: Text (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847), p. 199.
656 Ibid., pp. 5, 199; Harrison, *Victorian Stained Glass*, p. 23.
657 Winston’s influence extended beyond his writing, and contributed to developments in glass production that informed the materials available to artists like Waller in the twentieth century. In 1849 he conducted experiments on medieval stained-glass windows to determine the chemical properties of the glass and glazes and thus create glass of a similar exceptional quality. Once the medieval recipes were determined, new glass was made by James Powell & Sons, at the behest of Winston. The glass he produced was superior to other glass available at the time used by practitioners from the 1850s, yet, due to their lack of training in stained glass, many early windows do not feature designs that match the quality of the glass. A. Charles Sewter, *The Stained Glass of William Morris and His Circle* (London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 18.
658 Morris and Burne-Jones each designed stained glass for the Morris & Co. firm, but did not make their windows. This task was assigned to craftspeople working in the Morris & Co. firm. Ibid.
660 He identified six essential characteristics of the Gothic, which he placed in the following order of importance: Savageness, Changefulness, Naturalism, Grotesqueness, Rigidity and Redundance. In 1892 William Morris’ Kelmscott Press published an illustrated edition of ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, with a preface by Morris. The six characteristics Ruskin identified were discussed as points of contrast with contemporary Victorian architecture, which Ruskin considered monotonous in terms of character and artistic merits.
661 Ibid., p. 48.
662 The firm was originally called Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company “Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture and the Metals,” and was jointly established by Morris, Burne-Jones, Philip Webb (1831–1915), Ford Maddox Brown (1821–1892), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882),
Jones sympathised with Pugin’s views, they focussed more on social than religious regeneration through their domestic and ecclesiastical stained glass and in the other artworks and decorative cycles they produced. This is reflected in Arts and Crafts stained glass—a major art form associated with the Movement during its prime—which engages with Christian iconography in a manner that reflects the values of its day, rather than the religious fervour of the Middle Ages.\footnote{663}

The didactic imperative was a central Arts and Crafts value that was expressed in the Movement’s stained glass and is another factor that would have appealed to Waller’s aesthetic values. Morris was driven by a Socialist objective to renew society through educating individuals on taste and highlighting the ways in which the machine age had encroached on traditional ways of life. This included the handicrafts and the decorative and applied arts, as he expressed in an 1881 lecture, “Art and the Beauty of the Earth”: “in almost all cases there is no sympathy between the designer and the man who carries out the design...”.\footnote{664} Yet, despite the tone Morris adopted in his numerous essays and public lectures, his firm did not privilege the individual creativity of the artist and contradicted these views by producing stained glass in a hierarchical production line manner: different tasks were divided between employees and window designs were recycled.\footnote{665} It was a dichotomy of which many later Arts and Crafts practitioners—including Whall—were critical.

Whall’s Arts and Crafts theories of stained glass were expressed in the influential treatise \textit{Stained Glass Work}, Waller’s copy of which I located in her home.\footnote{666} The text built on Pugin, Oliphant and Winston’s views on how stained glass should be made. He laid out a model for the instruction and execution of stained glass that privileged the mastering of all aspects of stained glass production. Although he drew on the precepts of the Gothic Revival, Whall’s Arts and Crafts ethos differed in that his

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Charles J. Faulkner (1833–1892) and Peter Paul Marshall (1830-1900). In the 1870s it was rebranded Morris & Co., and managed by Morris and Burne-Jones.
\item 663 Stained glass was a major component of the Arts and Crafts movement. Despite this, scholarship over the past century focuses on interior decorative schemes, failing to adequately consider the significant place of stained glass in the firm’s output as it was the leading manufacturer of Arts and Crafts stained glass in the nineteenth century.
\item 666 I located a 1922 edition of \textit{Stained Glass Work} with the name “Christian Waller” inscribed on the front endpapers during a visit to the Waller House in July 2011.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
philosophy was to produce windows that embraced modern modes of design, using the finest materials and in keeping with medieval methods of production.\textsuperscript{667} He favoured single figures in his compositions, an approach drawn from the late-Middle Ages that is seen in Waller’s work.\textsuperscript{668} Her stained-glass owes a debt to the Arts and Crafts movement, in particular the work and philosophies of Christopher and Veronica Whall.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Shared Values: The Legacy of Christopher Whall and the Teaching of Veronica Whall}
\end{quote}

As has been established, Whall played a key role in advancing the Arts and Crafts Movement in stained glass and was a significant influence on Waller. He outlined his views in the previously mentioned treatise \textit{Stained Glass Work}. The publication, Cormack contends, is not merely an artist’s manual on the art of stained glass, but is also a distillation of the philosophy behind the Arts and Crafts Movement: truth to materials, engagement with nature, the originality of the practitioner, and sympathy towards the intended architectural environment of the window.\textsuperscript{669}

In his capacity as a teacher, theorist and distinguished practitioner, Whall inspired the next generation of stained-glass artists to adopt his philosophies. This included artists across Great Britain and in Ireland, as well as in America.\textsuperscript{670} Women were treated equally under his tuition, a marked contrast with the wider stained-glass industry in which women had little to no involvement.\textsuperscript{671} In 1898, under the direction of Walter Crane, Whall established a stained glass course at the Royal College of Art in London. In this endeavour he was assisted by former \textit{protégé} Alfred E. Drury (1868–1940), who also assisted Whall’s course on stained glass at the Central School of Arts.

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\textsuperscript{667} In a draft lecture about stained glass written in 1914 Whall argued that the “weak spot” of the Gothic Revival was “the mistake of trying to revive by close imitation the outward features and peculiarities of a past age”. C. W. Whall, “Stained Glass Present: Lecture No. 2,” in Papers of Christopher Whall (London: National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1914), p. 12.
\textsuperscript{668} Raguin, \textit{The History of Stained Glass: The Art of Light Medieval to Contemporary}, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{669} Peter Cormack, \textit{The Stained Glass Work of Christopher Whall} (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1999), p. 38.
\textsuperscript{670} In America, leading Arts and Crafts stained-glass artist Charles Connick (1875–1945) saw examples of Whall’s stained glass in Boston and subsequently read \textit{Stained Glass Work}. The affect of the latter was so profound that Connick declared himself to be an immediate convert and duly and subsequently travelled to London where he met with Whall and observed him working in his studio.
\end{footnotesize}
and Crafts, London, which was first taught in 1899. Waller embraced Whall’s Arts and Crafts teaching methods when she studied under his daughter Veronica Whall at their London firm Whall & Whall Ltd. in 1929.

Initially trained as a painter, Christopher Whall, like Waller, gravitated to the art of stained glass as a mature artist. When he began designing for stained glass in the 1880s, the British revival of the medium was in a state of decline, and large stained glass firms dominated the industry. He condemned the minor role he was able to play in the process—save for designing the window itself. As a result, he campaigned to revive the stained glass industry and set about studying medieval techniques of glassblowing and design in order to equip himself with the technical knowledge to do so. Whall promoted the notion of the independent artist in stained glass, responsible for the conception, design and execution of the window when he taught stained glass in London; from 1896 at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and from 1898–1903 at the Royal College of Art. He emphasised quality and originality over commercial factors and, in Stained Glass Work, advocated four principles to guide the successful instruction of stained glass, each of which Waller embraced:

1. Not to direct what he cannot practice;
2. To make masters of apprentices, or aim at making them;
3. To keep his hand of mastery over the whole work personally at all stages; and
4. To be prepared sometimes to make sacrifices of profit for the sake of Art, should the interests of the two clash.

He disseminated these principles through his pupils which were collectively known as the Whall School.

Waller’s working methods demonstrate the lengths she took to be an independent master of the medium, as fostered by her tuition at Whall & Whall Ltd. She worked without the aid of assistants during the early phase of her practice, except for an unnamed employee from the firm Brooks, Robinson & Co. who cut glass from her

672 Arts and Crafts Stained Glass, p. 97.
673 Miley has noted that Waller was influenced by Whall, his daughter and their firm. Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” pp. 43–44.
674 Whall studied at the Royal Academy Schools and the National Art Training School (later Royal College of Art) in London between 1867 and 1874. Arts and Crafts Stained Glass, p. 27; “Recreating a Tradition: Christopher Whall (1849–1924) and the Arts and Crafts Renaissance of English Stained Glass,” p. 33.
675 Arts and Crafts Stained Glass, p. 97.
677 Cormack has shown that the values outlined in Stained Glass Work and other titles in the series Artistic Crafts Series of Technical Handbooks (which was edited by Lethaby and published by John Hogg) had a significance influence on modern artists. Cormack, Arts and Crafts Stained Glass, p. 108.
cartoons and another man who did the leading; her painstaking attention to every detail of design and making was so slow that she regularly lost commissions.\(^{678}\) As Mollie Westhoven reported on the 1948 interview with Waller in the *Argus*, her working process meant that it took about six months to complete each window, “if everything goes wonderfully, with no hitches, working night and day”.\(^{679}\) This reveals that the artist sought to produce work of the highest standard, whatever the time—and subsequent loss in earnings—involved.

Whall’s philosophy of stained glass was rooted in an appreciation of the didactic spiritual potential of the art form and its potential to inspire and uplift the viewer; he sought to convince others of his opinion in *Stained Glass Work*. The book was intended for five audiences: craftspeople working in large, hierarchical firms; the professional artist who approached the art of stained glass in the manner of easel painting; the patron, seeking to learn about the art form; the ecclesiastical architect who wished to understand the medium which was a key element of church architecture; and, to

a new and important class that has lately sprung into existence, the well-equipped, picked student brilliant and be-medalled, able draughtsman, able painter; young, thoughtful, ambitious, and educated, who, instead of drifting, as till recently, into the overcrowded ranks of picture-making, has now the opportunity of choosing other weapons in the armoury of the arts.\(^{680}\)

Waller belonged to the last of the five intended audiences, for she set about becoming an ecclesiastical stained-glass artist after having established herself as a printmaker and illustrator. Whall’s eloquent description of this audience reveals that he viewed it as the future of the medium of stained glass, and encouraged talented young artists, like Waller, to take up the medium.

\(^{678}\) In a 1935 article published in the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, an unnamed journalist reported that Waller kept two ‘men’ employed glazing (cutting glass) and leading her windows.


679 Westhoven, “*She Copes with a Five Year Queue...*” p. 2.

Not simply a theorist, Whall was also a skilled stained-glass artist who put his theories into practice. In the six multi-light windows he produced for the Lady Chapel of Gloucester Cathedral (built 1089–1499), Gloucester, England, in 1898 he combined traditional principles of medieval stained glass with the use of vibrant colours and stylised, slightly abstracted forms that espoused Arts and Crafts values [Figure 126]. He successfully crafted windows that harmonise with the medieval Gothic architecture, without attempting to mimic it.\(^{681}\) Books and tourist information in the Waller House indicates that Waller visited the Cathedral to see Whall’s exceptional work first hand.\(^{682}\)

Waller may have been inspired by Whall’s masterful use of colour that emphasised the visual impact of the Lady Chapel windows; she adopted a similar colour palette in her work. The vibrant pastel palette Whall employed consisted largely of blue, purple, pink and aquamarine tones, similar to those seen in Waller’s windows. He contrasted vibrant crimson, purple and blue glass with extensive use of clear glass, thereby enhancing the jewel-like quality of the coloured glass and permitting light into the Chapel. The windows make use of his preference for English slab glass.\(^{683}\) Noted for its irregular texture and colour density, slab glass was an expensive yet artistically sound choice as its texture caused light to refract off the surface in a manner that heightened the luminosity of the window. He created a scheme that

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\(^{681}\) Cormack, The Stained Glass Work of Christopher Whall, unpaginated.

\(^{682}\) This includes a tourist pamphlet of Gloucester, a pamphlet about Whall’s windows in the Cathedral and a book about places of worship in the Gloucester Tewksbury region.

harmonised with the medieval architecture and extant fragments of medieval glass, yet contributed a modern atmosphere to the space.

The Lady Chapel windows epitomise Whall’s individual approach to stained glass and would have demonstrated to Waller that this could be achieved whilst adhering to Arts and Crafts principles. He advocated naturalism in terms of design—especially figure design—and encouraged pupils to develop this through life drawing. This is exemplified by two adjacent lights within the sanctuary depicting the *Reconciliation of Man to God Through the Incarnation* (1910) [Figure 127]. At first glance, the lights have a light, luminous quality, yet, upon closer inspection, the naturalistic treatment of the figures—including drapery—as well as the rich variety of colours becomes apparent: Eve, on the left light, wears a dress featuring various hues of green glass, covered in a cloak with orange hues and silver stain. She stands in front of a background of semi-translucent pale green and turquoise glass, in which dark and blue diamond glass is sporadically inserted (appearing like precious gems). On the right, the Virgin Mary is shown in profile in a state of prayer. Her robes of white glass—with some silver stain detailing on the outer layer—are juxtaposed with a long blue train running down from the blue crown she wears, which is surrounded by a blue halo filled with white stars. Crimson and pink glass, with touches of blue, are used for the angels’ wings at the top of the light. The use of blue and clear glass creates a visual harmony between the two lights. In the entire scheme for the Lady Chapel, Whall successfully engaged with medieval traditions whilst imbuing a fresh approach to the windows. It is considered one of the finest schemes of Arts and Crafts stained glass.

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684 Harrison, *Victorian Stained Glass*, p. 66.
685 Cormack, *Arts and Crafts Stained Glass*, p. 150.
It is likely that Waller became aware of Whall and his firm in 1921, through her friend John Trinick who, as mentioned, was employed by Whall at the Whall and Whall Ltd. Studio from 1921–1924. The Wallers stayed with Trinick and his wife Mabel in the outer-London suburb of Hammersmith while they studied with Veronica Whall. A photograph in Trinick’s papers shows the Waller’s outside a stained-glass studio (possibly Whall & Whall Ltd.) with what appears to be Whall’s dog [Figures 12-29]. The fact that Trinick kept this image indicates he may have taken it, signalling a closeness between him, the Wallers and Whall.

Whall & Whall Ltd.’s windows fitted Christian Waller’s conception of stained glass better than any other firm, particularly regarding the use of colour. Christopher Whall’s work contrasts significantly with the re-used designs executed in muted colours that dominate Victorian stained glass from the rise of Morris & Co. in the 1860s. Windows produced by the firm, although celebrated for their distinct, Pre-Raphaelite style that, as mentioned, did not strive to replicate medieval glass, lacked the vibrancy and commitment to Arts and Crafts values seen in the work of Whall and his pupils. Morris & Co. windows are noted for the subdued colours of their

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686 Waller may have been familiar with Whall and his work prior to this time, possibly through journals including The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art (1893–1964).
glass, particularly those produced in the 1860s, and for the extensive use of clear glass in their windows.687

Veronica Whall was one of these influential practitioners whose work informed Waller’s. My research has revealed that Whall and Waller shared similar philosophies on making stained glass, as well as personal spiritual interests. In 1935 Whall outlined her views on the medium in a five-page article, “Glass, Lead, and—Light”, in the English journal *Stained Glass*.688 She identified the three essential elements of stained glass to be glass, lead and light, and linked the art of stained glass with the Christian concept of God creating light.689 The views laid out in the essay have direct parallels with those her father advanced in, *Stained Glass Work*, as well as those articulated by Waller in “A Stained-Glass Window” and indicates that she continued to teach her father’s philosophy at Whall and Whall Ltd.

Specifically, the period in which Christian and Napier Waller studied with her coincided with Whall’s completion of a major commission associated with medievalism. In 1929 Whall received the commission by retired American custard powder magnate Edward Glasscock (d. 1934) to make seventy-two stained-glass windows for King Arthur’s Great Halls, in Tintagel, Cornwall, England. The building was intended to function as a meeting place for a Chivalrous Order of Knights based on the Legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.690

Six large windows are located in the Great Halls and depict key scenes from the legends of King Arthur. In one of these windows, *Excalibur* (c. 1930) [Figure 130] Whall portrayed the famous mythical scene of King Arthur retrieving the magical sword, Excalibur, from a piece of stone. The narrative takes place on the grounds of a medieval castle and features Arthur standing in profile in the centre, facing towards the right as he extracts the sword. People are gathered behind the sword watching Arthur’s feat. On the left-hand side Merlin and five knights stand with their bodies stacked in such a way as to give depth to the image. Waller employed a similar

688 I have been unable to find evidence that a copy of the journal was available in Melbourne during Waller’s lifetime. It is highly likely that Whall discussed her views with pupils such as Waller. No copies of these issues are currently located in an Australian library; I consulted the copy at the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England in July 2012.
689 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
Miley drew attention to the importance of light to Waller, both literal and symbolic.
technique of stacking figures—particularly heads—in her stained glass. This can be seen in the windows *St Peter’s Sermon on the Morning of Pentecost* (1936) [Figure 131], which was introduced in Chapter One.  

![Image of stained glass window]

Whall’s commission would have interested Waller, given the mystical associations surrounding King Arthur and Tintagel. There are tangible links between the Great Halls, Arthurian mysticism and occult spiritual enquiry. In the Victorian era, North Cornwall became associated with what has been identified as mystical responses to Arthurian legends. Tintagel’s ties to the Arthurian legend predated the nineteenth century, as Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1095–c. 1155) in his iconic *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136) listed Tintagel, and the remains of its medieval castle, as the birthplace of King Arthur.  

![Image of stained glass window]

Discussion of Whall’s involvement with King Arthur’s Great Halls offers an important context to a study on Waller and the ways in which she engaged with Arts and Crafts principles of art and design along with Celtic and Medieval mysticism during her travels. I argue that this connection with the site is another instance of Whall’s and Waller’s friendship that was based on shared interests in stained glass, medievalism and book illustration. Ephemera in the Waller house including a tourist pamphlet and newspaper clipping regarding Whall’s stained-glass windows at King Arthur’s Great Halls would have intrigued Waller.  

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691 This design technique can also be seen in the design *The Lords of Venus* from her printed book *The Great Breath* (1932).

692 Hale, “The Land near the Dark Cornish Sea: The Development of Tintagel as a Celtic Pilgrimage Site,” p. 207.
Arthur’s Great Halls indicates that Waller visited the site. This evidence suggests that Waller may have travelled to Tintagel with Whall, given that the timing of Waller’s visit coincided with the commission. The scope of Whall’s work—comprising seventy-two windows and taking some three years to complete—means that it was her largest commission. It is therefore likely that she would have sought the assistance from pupils and fellow artists at her studio.

The legacy of the Gothic Revival and Arts and Crafts Movement’s revival shaped Waller’s approach to the art of stained glass. Discussion now turns to her journey towards becoming an independent stained-glass artist in Australia during the first half of the twentieth century.


The Arts and Crafts Movement’s had a significant influence on stained glass in Victoria. The area was home to a number of fine examples of Victorian-era and Arts and Crafts stained glass that was imported to meet local needs from the 1870s and well into the twentieth century. In its capital Melbourne, as art historian Geoffrey Down observed, a great deal of stained glass was brought over from Britain and Germany. Melbourne churches favoured the British firms of John Hardman & Co. of Birmingham (the firm established by Hardman who, as previously mentioned, was commissioned by Pugin to produce his windows) and Clayton and Bell of London. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, as Australia headed towards Federation, Australian stained glass artists—including Ferguson and

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693 An inscription in a book written and illustrated by Whall, The Story of Peterkin in the Wood (1912), that she dedicated to Waller reveals the warm friendship that developed during their stay: “in fond memories of that happy summer we spent together—your friend Veronica Whall”.


695 Harrison, Victorian Stained Glass, pp. 40–41; Zimmer, Stained Glass in Australia, p. 64.

696 Down lists London, Birmingham, Munich, Brussels and Paris as the centres of nineteenth century stained glass.


697 Clayton and Bell produced the cycle of windows in Melbourne’s largest Anglican church, St Paul’s Cathedral, Melbourne which took four years to complete and was unveiled in 1891. For detailed analysis of the stained-glass windows at St Paul’s Cathedral, see: Hughes, “Twentieth Century Stained Glass in Melbourne Churches,” p. 12.
Urie, Montgomery and Brooks, Robinson & Co.—began to receive more commissions, despite the ongoing competition from British firms. From its inception in 1887, William Montgomery’s studio was highly sought after by clients of all religious denominations, and received a significant share of stained glass commissions. However by that stage, as Bronwyn Hughes has shown, the multi-light windows in Melbourne’s principal churches had already been fitted with imported stained-glass windows, and Australian practitioners were left to fill the single-light windows in the nave and transept. It was through commissions for new churches that stained glass artists had the potential to produce significant windows, as was the case with Waller’s windows for Williams’ churches. The dominance of imported stained glass in major Australian church buildings meant the designs and colour schemes were not always suitable for the specific architectural environment of the church (as they were made by artists who had never visited Australia and could not fully appreciate the difference in light to that of England), thereby reducing its potential to inspire and uplift the spirit.

In Victoria, the aims of the Arts and Crafts Movement were not simply known to those involved in local responses to it, but were viewed as extensions of those undertaken in Britain. The objective to promote the values of the Movement led to the establishment of the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria in 1908. One key point of difference in Victoria was the absence of the socialist emphasis the Movement had in Britain. Instead, Australian artists and artisans combined an interest in Australian flora, fauna and materials with the Arts and Crafts ethos of truth to materials.

As in Britain, Australian journals were a key platform through which the values of the Arts and Crafts Movement were disseminated. The most influential Australian journal was *Arts and Crafts*, first published in Melbourne in October 1895. The publication was spearheaded by Hall and included Montgomery amongst its contributors.
As previously discussed, Bernard Hall was Waller’s painting teacher at the National Gallery Art School and Montgomery played a key role in facilitating her embrace of stained glass. As such, Waller’s teachers were at the vanguard of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Victoria and might have conveyed their appreciation for the values of the Movement to their pupil. Although these publications emerged during Waller’s childhood, she was directly influenced by the Arts and Crafts values they promoted through the professional relationships she developed with key players in the Movement in Victoria, including Hall.

Montgomery viewed himself as an independent artist in stained glass. This contrasted with the prevailing view of stained glass as a craft. His self-identification as an artist perhaps reflects the fact he, like Whall, studied fine art as well as learning the art of stained glass. Hughes has drawn attention to his comprehensive training in traditional glass painting during his indenture with Henry Mark Barnett (1833–88). A former pupil of the Gothic-Revival stained glass artist William Wailes (1808–81) who produced some of Pugin’s early stained glass, Barnett went on to establish his own firm in Newcastle upon Tyne, in England’s north. Montgomery then studied at the Newcastle Art School, which was geared towards improving the education of manufacturers in Britain through the application of good design. In 1871 he won a prestigious scholarship to study at the School of Art at South Kensington, London. The School offered art tuition of the highest standard (although a continuation to a higher level of the same course as Newcastle), something which Hughes has noted and distinguished him from those who were at the level of an artisan and set him up for his career as an independent stained-glass artist. Building on this foundation, Montgomery carried the values of fine art into his stained glass practice.

This is evident during Montgomery’s professional life, including his period of employment with the London firm Clayton & Bell in 1874–77. Boasting the most prolific output of all British stained glass firms in the Victorian Age, Clayton & Bell was founded in 1855 by John Richard Clayton (1827–1913) and Alfred Bell (1832–

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703 Others included Building (Sydney, 1907–1942), Building, Engineering and Mining Journal (1897–1905) and The Australasian Builder and Contractor’s News (1887–1895).
705 Ibid., pp. 10–12.
706 Ibid., pp. 16–19.
95) who shared respect for the traditions of stained glass. Despite this, it was run in the manner of other large Victorian firms, with artistic standards increasingly giving way to commercial factors from the mid-1860s onwards.\textsuperscript{708} Harrison singled out Clayton & Bell’s greatest achievement as having trained a number of leading artists who later established an independent practice.\textsuperscript{709} Montgomery was one of these practitioners who, although having worked in a commercial firm, set about becoming an independent stained-glass artist who operated in a manner that upheld the highest standards of the medium. His consideration of stained glass as an art form is seen in the fact he signed his windows and exhibited designs for stained glass in art exhibitions.\textsuperscript{710} These were practices Waller would later follow.

Montgomery then worked for seven years at Franz Mayer & Co. in Munich before migrating to Australia in 1886. He settled in Melbourne and set up a studio in Flinders Street, the centre of the city.\textsuperscript{711} Montgomery’s glass is featured extensively in churches and private homes in the state of Victoria. It did not take long for his talents to be recognised and, as Hughes asserts, he quickly provided a local alternative to English and European stained glass firms, whose glass was costly and took time to ship.\textsuperscript{712} Montgomery’s windows are noted for their fine painting, elaborate tracery (something he may have learnt during his time with Clayton & Bell) and rich use of colour.

The \textit{Great West Window} (1899) [Figure 132] in the Church of All Saints, Bendigo, Victoria exemplifies Montgomery’s mastery of stained glass. Here he used a mosaic-like technique when he inserted jewel-like pieces of glass in the three-light-window that depicts Christ as King of the Universe in the central panel. Christ, depicted in white robes, floats in front of circular forms that represent the rays of the sun. Faces of angels are subtly positioned between the rays in a similar manner to the way in which Waller repeatedly incorporated sunrays to symbolise the light of heaven in her windows, such as \textit{Revelation Window} (1948) [Figure 133]. Three roundels are situated above the three lights in his window: the central one depicting a lamb with angels either side. Various worshippers are depicted at the base of each light, including

\textsuperscript{708} These included John Burlison and Thomas Grylls who formed the partnership Burlison & Grylls, and Charles Kempe.
\textsuperscript{709} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{710} Harrison, \textit{Victorian Stained Glass}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{712} Ibid.
Reverend Garlick, in whose memory the window was commissioned and dedicated. Waller may have viewed this window when she lived in Bendigo.

Montgomery’s views on the key principles of good stained glass have parallels with the Arts and Crafts values Waller embraced. In August 1894, Montgomery delivered a lecture to the Victorian Institute of Architects that was published the following month as the article, “The Art of Glass Painting”, in which his articulated philosophy of stained glass was published in the journal *Australasian Builder and Contractors' News*. Montgomery opened the article by stating: “At a time when the decorative arts are being diligently fostered in most of the older countries of the world, it will not do for us [Australia]… to lag behind”. This can be interpreted as a rallying cry for Australian artists and designers to embrace the decorative arts. He went on to cite the social benefits of the decorative arts:

The importance and true relation of these arts to our ordinary life is being daily more recognized, and writers like William Morris hold that an existence without Art in some shape or other is but a bare and barren one.

Clearly, then, Montgomery embraced the view that the fine and decorative arts had important social functions that gave value and meaning to humanity.

When he established his studio in Australia he combined an awareness of the artistic potential of stained glass with a thorough understanding of the practical demands of the medium. Montgomery made a conscious decision to establish a small studio

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713 “Memorial Window to the Late Rev. J Garlick,” *Bendigo Advertiser* 1 November 1898, p. 4.
715 Ibid.
where he could oversee each phase of the production of stained glass. His decade or more of experience in large commercial establishments had convinced him of the dilution of ideas that resulted.  

This synthesis of art, design and industry had been lacking in Australian stained glass firms and studios, most of which followed the commercial model (an exception being the Sydney firm Lyon, Cottier and Co). It contributed to the emergence of fine stained glass firms and practitioners in Melbourne who benefited from Montgomery’s legacy.

Waller shared Montgomery's decision to follow the Arts and Crafts paradigm and become an independent stained glass artist. This is evident from her earliest surviving work in the medium. Waller and her husband first became acquainted with the Montgomery family when they were students at the National Gallery Art School in the early 1910s; they studied with and befriended Montgomery’s son William ‘Mont’ Montgomery (1890–1918) at the School, and remained close with the family after his death in battle during the First World War. The Wallers also knew the elder Montgomery given that he was President of the Victorian Artists Society (1912–17) at the time when they exhibited their art in the Society’s exhibitions.

Stylistically, parallels exist between Christian Waller’s early work and that produced by Montgomery, in addition to the Great West Window. Around the time of the First World War there was a shift in the palette of Montgomery’s windows as cooler, brighter tones are introduced. This is seen in the rose window St Michael (1921) [Figure 134] located in Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Kew, Victoria. Aquamarine, purple, mauve, pink and magenta dominate in the design and add a mystical quality to the window due to the use of dream-like colours. The treatment of St Michael’s

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719 Ibid., pp. 107–18.
wings is particularly illustrative of a modern shift in Montgomery’s work that has parallels with work produced by Whall and the ‘Whall School’.\textsuperscript{720} This is notable in the gradations of colour used to make up the wings, similar to Christopher Whall’s depiction of angels in the \textit{Chapter House East Window} (1903) [Figure 135] at Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucester, England.

\begin{figure}[h!]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure135.png}
\caption{Christopher Whall and Lowndes & Drury, \textit{Chapter House East Window} (detail), 1903, stained glass, Chapter House, Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucester, England. Author’s image}
\end{figure}

Given that Montgomery worked in a manner advocated by Whall and other eminent Arts and Crafts stained-glass artists, he was the obvious choice for Waller to turn to when she decided to become a stained-glass artist. Hughes asserts that the Wallers also received some tuition from Montgomery when, early in 1926, he had employed Napier Waller to complete cartoons for him, and they continued to work with him until his death in July the following year.\textsuperscript{721} She has identified several cartoons they made for Montgomery, based on stylistic grounds and their preference to use charcoal on cartoons (Montgomery preferred to use sepia ink or walnut stain).\textsuperscript{722} These include windows designed by Christian Waller at the following churches: Bathurst Cathedral, Bathurst, New South Wales, St Mary’s Bridgewater [Figure 136], Tasmania, and St James’, Jericho, Tasmania.\textsuperscript{723} This argument accounts for May Montgomery’s (William Montgomery’s widow) promotion of the Wallers’ suitability to make stained glass after her husband’s death in July 1927. May Montgomery asked the Wallers for assistance with several outstanding commissions, including the multi-light \textit{Great South Window} for the Wilson Hall (built in 1879), University of Melbourne.\textsuperscript{724}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[720] This term refers to stained glass artists who studied under Christopher and Veronica Whall.
\item[722] Ibid., p. 232.
\item[723] Further information can be found in Appendix D.
\item[724] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Waller’s initial work in stained glass occurred in 1924, earlier than previously understood. In November that year she exhibited *David (Stained Glass Design)* in an exhibition at Melbourne’s New Gallery. While the work does not survive, the fact she created a design for stained glass indicates that she was interested in the medium prior to her formal involvement with Montgomery and his firm. In all likelihood she sought him out as a mentor, and did not passively fall into working in stained glass as a result of his having approached Napier Waller to assist him. It is clear that Christian Waller asserted her interest in working in stained glass, leading to her complete cartoons for Montgomery. From the late-1920s, Waller applied her Arts and Crafts values to a monumental art form and realised a means of communicating spiritual values to larger audiences and congregations than was feasible through her work in graphic art.

Through her involvement with the Melbourne arts scene Waller may have met Anglican Arts and Crafts architect Louis R. Williams. In 1922, they both exhibited work in the same section—Oils, Watercolours, Etchings and Architectural Studies—of the Victorian Artists’ Society’s *Annual Autumn Exhibition*. Her relationship with him may also have been facilitated by the Montgomerys. Specifically, in 1927 Williams designed extensions to the Bathurst Cathedral, Bathurst, New South Wales—two of the churches Waller completed stained glass designs for on

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726 After 1926 Christian Waller did not produce illustrations (save for those for her own books *The Great Breath* and *The Gates of Dawn* in 1932), and began focusing attention on ecclesiastical stained glass, a medium which aligned with her spiritual values and artistic objectives. This point is expanded on in Chapter Seven.
Montgomery’s behalf. This included the head in St John for Montgomery’s *Hero and Love Window*. A receipt in Montgomery’s Collection at State Library Victoria indicated that she was paid £7.7.0 in August 1927. Although engaged by May Montgomery, Waller may have meet Williams at this time or when Waller returned to Melbourne in 1930. They quickly developed a fruitful working relationship for, as mentioned in the Introduction, more than half of the windows she produced were created for churches he designed.

Waller may have met Williams at this time or when Waller returned to Melbourne in 1930. They quickly developed a fruitful working relationship for, as mentioned in the Introduction, more than half of the windows she produced were created for churches he designed. Williams embraced modern tenets in architecture, yet retained a commitment to Arts and Crafts values throughout his professional life. He gained this from his tuition with Alexander North in his home state of Tasmania, under whom he finished his articles. In 1912 Williams became the junior partner in North’s architecture firm, and they moved to Melbourne. North was born in the English county of Yorkshire in 1858 and migrated to Australia in 1883 with a firm grounding in Gothic revival Arts and Crafts principles of design. He combined these influences in ecclesiastic commissions he completed in Tasmania and Victoria. His rural Tasmanian churches of Christ Church, Illawarra (1910) and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Mangana (1910) combine Arts and Crafts elements with Gothic details.

Williams’ architecture was an Australian interpretation of Arts and Crafts values. This is seen in the way he combined Gothic influences and Arts and Crafts sensibilities with the use of modern materials, such as reinforced concrete. The parish church of St Ambrose, Gilgandra, New South Wales exemplifies Williams’ Art and Crafts style. The church, which was built in 1922–23, has several hallmarks of Williams’ ecclesiastical architecture: it is built from natural bricks which serve both a functional and a decorative quality; the window openings are tall and narrow and there is a great deal of wall space between them; decorations and ornamentation are minimal, yet they have been exquisitely crafted.

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729 I am grateful to Dr Bronwyn Hughes for drawing the receipt to my attention.
In his architecture, Williams created a distinctive design aesthetic through the combination of modern elements with Arts and Crafts principles. Hugh Rivers (1926–2013), an architect who worked with Williams in the early 1960s, observed that Williams upheld Arts and Crafts values and design integrity even at that late stage in his career. This life-long commitment has parallels with Waller’s own approach to designing and making stained-glass windows, which saw her develop an individual style that encompassed new forms of decorative expression, yet retained its Arts and Crafts roots. Specifically she shared Williams’ view that fine craftsmanship was an integral element of the architecture. The churches North and Williams completed in Victoria are the apogee of the Arts and Crafts tradition. Indeed, Williams carried the torch for the Arts and Crafts Movement in Victoria well into the twentieth century. The Movement, as architectural historian Harriet Edquist has highlighted, flourished between 1890 and the outbreak of the First World War. Churches and memorials were sites where the Movement flowered from the collaboration between architects and craftspeople who came together to produce environments created from natural materials to uplift and educate the public. Williams was, therefore, not simply a follower of the Arts and Crafts principles, but was also an innovative contributor to the broader discourse.

The emphasis Williams placed on craftsmanship emerged through his familiarity with Gothic revival and Arts and Crafts principles of design. Between 1910 and 1912 he studied building construction and architecture at the Hobart Technical School. The course syllabus included the work of Pugin and Ruskin that made a lasting impression on Williams and is expressed in his views on architecture. For example, in a foreword to a guidebook for St Saviour’s Cathedral in Goulburn, New South Wales, Williams praised the Gothic Revivalist style advanced by its architect Edmund

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734 Ibid., p. xii.
735 Ibid., p. 196.
736 During his tuition he was articled to the architect Frank Heyward, who, recognising Williams’ interest in ecclesiastical architecture, transferred him to Launceston where he went to work with North.
737 Specifically, Pugin’s The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England; Ruskin’s Seven Lamps of Architecture and The Stones of Venice (which included “The Nature of the Gothic”).
T. Blackett (1817–83). His Arts and Crafts philosophy of architecture and design would have appealed to Waller.

Waller and Williams’ collaborative relationship was, I argue, forged through shared Arts and Crafts values, and the guiding role that spirituality held in their work. The commonality of Waller’s and Williams’ values is evidenced through analysis of the latter’s 1929 article titled “Some Phases of Church Architecture in Australia”, in the Australian Church Union journal Defender. The article makes reference to the Gothic Revival and the Arts and Crafts notion of ‘truth’. Williams began by stating how the Gothic Revival in England influenced architectural practice in Australia:

The realisation that Gothic architecture was not spent, but still had a message to give, and could still be a living, progressing, architectural force was gradually borne in upon the minds of men who, in the ever constant search for Truth, Beauty and Goodness, found dissatisfaction in the current order.739

His use of the phrase “Truth, Beauty and Goodness” reveals his familiarity with Arts and Crafts values. Both Ruskin and Morris referred to these terms repeatedly in their writing, calling for art, design and society more broadly that placed truth, beauty, goodness and unity at the centre of every aspect of life.

Williams was responsible for recommending stained glass artists for the churches he designed. As such, he was influential in securing a number of commissions for Waller.740 In personal correspondence before he began working with Waller, he commented that “whoever is to do the designing should also be responsible for the cartooning and also select the glass” as he believed that “really good work requires that the one mind must be responsible for the whole thing and not under control”.741 These comments directly align with Arts and Crafts calls for the one artist to oversee the overall process of the conception, design and creation of stained glass. That Williams held this view would have appealed to Waller, and explains why she made windows almost exclusively for churches he designed.

738 Louis R. Williams, “Foreword”, in: Ransome T. Wyatt, S. Saviour’s Cathedral, Goulburn: A Short History and Guide Book (Goulburn, NSW: St Saviour’s Cathedral 1945), p. 3.
739 Miley also discussed their shared interest in Arts and Crafts values.
The Defender (Australian Church Union) 10, no. 65 (1929): p. 10.
The Chapel of the Resurrection at St Ambrose’s, Gilgandra, New South Wales: A Case Study

There is correspondence regarding a stained glass commission that reveals Waller’s methodical Arts and Crafts approach to her work as well as the role Williams played in obtaining commissions on her behalf. In 1934 Bishop Wylde wrote to Williams advising him that sufficient funds had been raised to commission two stained-glass windows for the Williams-designed church St Ambrose’s, Gilgandra, New South Wales, with the subjects *I am the Resurrection* [Figure 137] and *I am the Good Shepherd* [Figure 138] for the Chapel of the Resurrection (a small side chapel within the church). Wylde sought the architect’s advice regarding a suitable artist to carry out the work. Wylde notes Montgomery (whose business he believed to be carried on by Montgomery’s widow), Norman Carter (1875–1963) of Sydney, the Melbourne firm of Brooks, Robinson & Co. and Napier Waller; he declared himself inclined towards the last due to his familiarity with Waller’s “two very beautiful windows” in Williams’ church of All Saints, Canowindra, New South Wales.

In his reply Williams advised Wylde that May Montgomery had ceased working in stained glass, ruled out Brooks, Robinson & Co. and listed the remaining three suggestions in order of preference: Napier Waller, William Bustard (1894–1973) and

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742 The church was built with funds awarded by St Ambrose’s, Bournemouth, England, to the town within the British Commonwealth that made remarkable service to King and country during the First World War. Gilgandra won due to the successful recruitment march, the Coo-ee March, that left the town in 1915 and marched all the way to Sydney, picking up new recruits along the way.

Correspondence: Stained-Glass Windows in the Chapel of the Resurrection, 1934–1944. St Ambrose, Gilgandra, NSW.

743 Bishop A. L. Wylde to Louis R. Williams, 14 April 1934: ibid.
Carter. However, he then swiftly moved to suggest Christian Waller for the commission, declaring that “of all the designers in Australia, I consider that there are none comparable with Napier Waller and Mrs. Waller; I would even place Mrs. Waller first”. He explained that she was currently working on windows for three of his churches and reported on the positive reception by donors General and Mrs Grimwade who were “completely won over by the magnificence of the design and the whole conception” of the unnamed window [*The Song of St Francis* (1934)].

Williams’ comments highlight his regard for Christian Waller’s work, and he concludes his letter by commenting on the fact that she and her husband were artists in stained glass, very different to receiving work produced in a factory, and that Wylde could “depend upon receiving understanding and sympathetic appreciation of what you design”. In his reply on 24 April 1934, Wylde advised Williams that he would be happy for Napier Waller and his wife to carry out the work, however he advises that he had written to his superior seeking their sanction for giving the commission to Waller (presumably Christian Waller).

Williams responded on 4 May 1934 by eloquently advocating for the merits of Christian Waller’s stained glass, informing Wylde that he “can depend upon it that her work will be splendid and is worth waiting for”. He had previously offered the following explanation of why the Wallers’ stained glass was the best available, and should be sought out despite the cost:

> Their work is more expensive than the trade firms for two reasons—1. That the joy of the work necessarily means that the glass is almost mosaiclike [sic], being made up of many smaller pieces than the ordinary trade windows, this entailing very much more lead work, cutting etc. 2. Likewise, there is the personal consideration of the artist[s’] themselves. They execute the whole of the work.

He noted that Christian Waller was due to visit his office and that he would direct her to establish communication with Wylde about the commission. His reference to

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744 Louis R. Williams to Bishop A. L. Wylde, 17 April 1934: ibid.
745 Louis R. Williams to Bishop A. L. Wylde, 17 April 1934: ibid.
746 Louis R. Williams to Bishop A. L. Wylde, 17 April 1934: ibid.
747 Louis R. Williams to Bishop A. L. Wylde, 17 April 1934: ibid.
748 Bishop A. L. Wylde to Louis R. Williams, 24 April 1934: ibid.
749 Louis R. Williams to Bishop A. L. Wylde, 4 May 1934: ibid.
750 Louis R. Williams to Bishop A. L. Wylde, 17 April 1934: ibid.
her work being “worth waiting for her” suggests that he had come to expect delays in receiving stained glass from Waller, and sought to pre-empt any concerns from Wylde about likely delays. Waller, for her part, flagged that she worked slowly and methodically on stained glass in her first letter to Wylde: “I am doing a lot of windows for Mr Williams at present. And one cannot hurry over them[.] Each tiny piece is picked out piece by piece, and a window big or small gets the same consideration”.  

This comment is illustrative of her commitment to producing work of the highest standard, whatever the time involved.

Williams’ regard for Waller’s stained glass demonstrates that her skills were recognised by a leading professional during her lifetime. As the Melbourne Anglican Diocese architect, Williams was the most sought-after ecclesiastic church architect during the 1920s and 1930s; the time when Waller produced windows for his churches. This was also a period marked by architectural expansion in a number of churches and the erection of new religious monuments due to commemorative efforts following the First World War. Williams worked predominately for the Anglican Church, though also completed work for other denominations. In Melbourne, the Anglican Church boasted the largest denomination in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, around thirty-five percent of the population. Waller was not unique in having her career advanced by association with a leading architect; in Britain, Whall likewise benefited from collaborations with leading architects.

**Arts and Crafts Values in Waller’s Ecclesiastical Stained Glass**

For Waller, stained glass was a platform for addressing the spiritual and the sacred, and directing her values in this regard to the faithful. Waller’s espousal of Arts and Crafts principles in her approach to stained glass is expressed in her 1931 essay “A Stained-Glass Window”. The essay was published in the inaugural edition of the Geelong-based arts magazine *Manuscripts*, edited by Tatlock Miller. “A Stained-Glass
Window” was the only essay Waller published, and is a valuable source for understanding her approach to stained glass.\textsuperscript{755} It reveals Waller’s commitment to the four key Arts and Crafts values—which were informed by the ideals of Morris, the Whalls, Montgomery and Williams—as she established herself as an independent practitioner in Melbourne.

There are strong synergies between Waller’s essay and Whall’s \textit{Stained Glass Work}, along with Veronica Whall’s 1935 essay “Glass, Lead, and—Light” (although the latter was written after Waller’s essay was published, it expresses the philosophy she was exposed to as a student at Whall and Whall Ltd.). Her romantic language highlights her personal appreciation of the medium at that time and, like Christopher Whall’s treatise and Veronica Whall’s essay, she provided a guide to the design and execution of stained glass. Each artist delineated the complex process of making a stained-glass window, and warned the would-be practitioner against succumbing to common errors that are made by the neophyte or commercially-minded artist and firm.

Waller’s essay echoes the philosophy of Whall & Whall Ltd. by emphasising the significance of four key elements of stained glass design and execution: truth to materials, truth to nature (including the importance of light), the artist as master of the medium, and truth to architecture. Christopher Whall also stressed their importance, when he argued in \textit{Stained Glass Work} that the great principles of the medium were those of “colour, of light, of architectural fitness, of limitations, of thought and imagination and allegory”.\textsuperscript{756} He went on to claim that “it is the right or wrong use of these high things that makes windows to be good or to be bad”.\textsuperscript{757} Drawing on Waller’s 1931 essay, \textit{Stained Glass Work} and “Glass, Lead, and—Light”, each of these four key elements that underscored Waller’s approach to stained glass is discussed, in order to highlight how they contributed to the transformative power of her work.

\textbf{Truth to Materials, Including the Role of Colour}

The Arts and Crafts imperative of ‘Truth to Materials’ informed Waller’s philosophy

\textsuperscript{755} Miley has drawn attention to Waller’s Arts and Crafts style and the influence of the Whalls on her practice. See: Waller, “A Stained-Glass Window,” pp. 28-30; Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” p. 43-48.
\textsuperscript{756} Whall, \textit{Stained Glass Work}, p. 155;
\textsuperscript{757} Ibid.
of the art of stained glass and is articulated in her essay. While she outlined her artistic process, it is the choice of coloured glass which she described as “the most fascinating process of the whole window…”758 She repeatedly returned to colour in the essay, indicating that this, and the quality of the glass, were key to the success of the window. As such, in this section I focus on ‘truth’ to the material of coloured glass.

Like Whall and his students, Waller employed a wide spectrum of colours and stylised individual motifs in her stained glass. The richness of the colours reflects the quality of the glass she used. Waller, like Whall, favoured Norman slab glass and had it cut to size by Brooks, Robinson & Co.759 In her essay she explained that this choice of glass came about because of her concern for colour:

Norman slabs measuring half an inch in the thickest parts offer great depth of colour and give contrast and value to antique glass which, though beautiful, is made of larger and thinner sheets.760

It was the uneven thickness and added texture of this type of glass that modulated the light—by distorting, reflecting and refracting it. Here Waller demonstrated her conviction that the most appropriate material must be used in order to create the best work possible. Furthermore, she was being true to the material and using it to its best advantage.

The quality of the coloured glass is seen in her earliest windows, such as Christ the King of All Nations (1931) [Figure 139] a six-lobed rose window at St Paul’s Canterbury, Victoria. The window features Christ in the centre surrounded by the

759 Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” p. 47.
Tree of Knowledge. A crouching man is depicted in each of the four lobes, representing the four corners of the world: Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe. Waller’s use of bold blue for the background contrasts with the translucent greens, greys and orange glass used for the Christ figure. The slight changes in shade and tint add life to the work. While using blues, greens and reds, Waller’s colours are of different shades to those used in medieval stained glass and by Pugin and others who sought to revive this practice. Waller also used small pieces of glass to build up the pattern and included pale, translucent colours on the Christ so that his figure would glow with the effect of it becoming illuminated by natural light.

The appropriate use of colour is a key element of design that contributed to the success of Waller’s stained glass, governing and enhancing the visual effect of the window by the quality and tones of the glass. Echoing Whall’s beliefs, in her essay, she warned the would-be practitioner against the artist’s temptation “to cram the window with only the richest colours, but”, she added, “experience teaches that an inter-play of neutrals gives value and depth”. Whall’s treatise reveals a similar philosophy, seen when he wrote that “harmony in colour depends not only upon the arranging of right colours together, but the arranging of the right quantities and the right degrees of them together”. The interval structure of the window—or the colour scheme of the design—has perhaps the greatest influence on the affect the window has upon the viewer. The success of Waller’s windows is that they feature harmonious colour schemes yet also draw on bold colour and striking symbols to form the image.

*St Hilda* (1915) [Figure 140] at St James’ Old Cathedral, West Melbourne, Victoria, is exemplary of Waller’s masterful use of colour and technique to create a visually striking and spiritually uplifting window. Pale pieces of green, orange, purple and blue glass form the border, while the central light featured rich purple and blue glass.

761 Waller’s portrayal of Christ has strong stylistic and compositional parallels with her design *The Magician of the Beautiful* from *The Great Breath*.


on the figure’s cloak, with paler tones in the background. In this window Waller added depth to the colour by double-plating her glass (affixing two pieces of glass together). This unusual technique is, according to Geoffrey Wallace who has restored several of Waller’s windows, characteristic of her work. This technique, which necessitated the use of more glass, was a costly and time-consuming process that Waller nonetheless undertook in order to produce a better window.

While much of Waller’s early stained glass was executed in bold, striking colours of purple, green and turquoise, she also produced windows with a pastel colour scheme. These included the two-light window and oculus produced in 1938 for the country church of St Paul’s, Linton, in Victoria. Waller used soft colours to evoke an atmosphere of spiritual contemplation within the church [Figure 141]. Her treatment of the angels has a mystical quality that contrasts with the standard representation of angels seen in the stained glass of her contemporaries. The design for the windows survives, and reveals how Waller developed the colour scheme using watercolour and gouache and successfully executed it in glass, demonstrating her knowledge of colour and artistic materials.


766 A similar effect is seen in windows (c. 1939) located above the nave of the St Barnabas’, West Wyalong, New South Wales and in other windows that feature angels. See Appendix D for more information.
The combination of bold and pastel colours bears the legacy of Waller’s tuition at Whall and Whall Ltd., as Christopher Whall pioneered the use of bold colours in his stained glass. This is best expressed in the Chapter House East Window [Figure 142] of Gloucester Cathedral, England, which was installed in 1903. This window—alongside Whall’s windows in the Lady Chapel also at Gloucester Cathedral—is considered the finest example of British Arts and Crafts stained glass.\(^{767}\) Here Whall employed a wide range of colours made available to him through modern techniques, in particular blues, turquoises and purples for the angels in the top of the tracery and yellows, reds and oranges to signify the sun.\(^{768}\) He did not use solid slabs of colour, but, rather, used small quantities of complementary colours to build up the design. This is known as the mosaic effect, a technique he championed and is seen throughout his stained glass work, including Saint Chad (c. 1901–10) [Figure 143], in the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.\(^{769}\)

Like Whall before her, Waller’s captivating use of colour and mosaic-like patterns in her design strengthens her work. This meant that she used small pieces of glass, each surrounded by leadlines, rather than large panes of uninterrupted colour, to build up her picture. The technique is evidenced in the first window she produced in Australia after completing her studies at Whall & Whall Ltd., St Andrew and St Nicholas (1930), for the Presbyterian Church, Shelford, Victoria. It is clear from the window and design [Figures 145–45] that Waller employed the mosaic technique, using small

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\(^{767}\) Cormack, Arts and Crafts Stained Glass, p. 150.
\(^{768}\) Ibid., pp. 150, 57.
\(^{769}\) This window is considered a study for a window of the same name designed for the Lady Chapel at Gloucester Cathedral.

pieces of glass to build up the picture. This is evident in the background of upper third, which depicts the sky and includes different shades of blue that are augmented by the inclusion of small pieces of glass in different colours. This feature was not included in the original design, suggesting that she modified it to achieve a better result. Leadlines and small pieces of glass make up the ship that dominates the images, the backgrounds and the border surrounding the window.

When Waller observed that “the more tiny the pieces, the more jewel-like the window”, she expressed a full awareness of the final effect the window produces in situ. In this way, she demonstrated her understanding of the mosaic technique. Upon close inspection, as Waller would have seen the window during its creation, the presence of the leadlines and saddle bars is pronounced, as are the distinct pieces of glass and colours employed. Despite seeing the window panels up close, Waller had the ability to recognise how this would change when installed.

Waller’s use of metallic oxide paints in her stained glass also aligns with the Arts and Crafts values advanced by the Whalls. Miley has identified “strong and clear” colour

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as a defining characteristic; however I argue that, it is the strength of her linework and sparing use of paint—combined with her interpretation of religious narratives—that work with her colour schemes to create windows that are visually affecting. In Waller’s essay she emphasised that while paint is applied to add a matt texture to the window—to avoid glare—deep black should only be used only for “the drawing of forms and shadows” and added a recommendation that a “a glint of light [be] lifted out in precious places”. Veronica Whall echoed these sentiments in her previously-mentioned essay, where she cautioned that “paint should be used circumspectly with the object of forcing the light through the more dense glasses…” The St Hilda window is an example of how Waller used paint to emphasise the narrative. She used dark black paint to create the striking geometric paint on the hem around the figure’s cloak, while softer black was used to evocatively depict the facial features and to matt the glass around the border. Her deft use of metallic oxide paints to create effects related to the narrative of the window and its materiality demonstrates her in-depth understanding of the medium in which she worked.

Truth to Nature, Including the Importance of Natural Light

The Arts and Crafts imperative of producing art that was ‘true to nature’ was something Waller personally interpreted in her stained glass. This philosophy had its roots in the writings of Ruskin—particularly The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849)—which concerned the view that artists must study and master the natural world in situ. I argue that Waller’s attention to the interplay of natural light in her windows is also a sign of her commitment to truth to nature. This too reflected her teacher’s sentiments, as Veronica Whall referred to light as a living thing and declared that stained glass artists:

have to use light…we have to mix it with out colours; we have to harness it; to tie it down; to make it stop where we want it,—or let it pour through; a stupendous, living, ever-changing force.

771 Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” p. 46.
Given the importance of light (and its connection to the sun, which she conceived as god-like) in Waller’s spiritual outlook, it is logical that while she included a range of natural imagery in her windows that referenced her knowledge of flora and fauna, she was primarily concerned with natural light. As she did throughout her practice, Waller personally interpreted aesthetic concepts when developing her distinct approach to art.

When she was focusing on book illustration Waller demonstrated her commitment to realistically depicting flora and fauna, and she carried this into her stained glass career. In 1920 she assembled *My Book of Flowers* [Figure 146]. This sketchbook, which is in the collection of the State Library Victoria, Melbourne, features cut and pasted photographs of flowers and plants from newspapers and magazines, accompanied by Waller’s pencil drawings (in pencil, watercolour and ink) of each species; mostly varieties of roses, peace lilies, irises and passion flowers, as well as mushrooms and branches. Some of the designs are annotated with notes related to the colloquial and scientific names of the plants, as well as the colours of different parts of the plant.

![Figure 146: My Book of Flowers, 1920, book with cover decorated in black ink, 22.0 x 15.0 cm, State Library Victoria, Melbourne](image-url)
Waller’s depiction of irises in My Book of Flowers is exemplary of the way she channelled extensive study of the natural world to develop stylised natural forms that were incorporated into her stained glass. On one page [Figure 147] she affixed three pencil studies of flowering irises and on another [Figure 148] completed three more polished sketches of the same flower in black ink. These show different perspectives of the flower in order to understand its physical structure. Elsewhere in the book she completed three watercolour studies of yellow and purple irises [Figures 149–151], a sign that having mastered the structure of the plant she felt comfortable to introduce
colour and, later, developed a stylised representation of the plant to use symbolically in her work.\textsuperscript{776}

This concern for truth to nature translated into her stained glass, and she incorporated flowers in the background of her designs, using colour and paint techniques to indicate its species. This echoed Christopher Whall’s advice to “study how nature does it” when depicting flora and fauna in stained glass.\textsuperscript{777} Waller’s use of natural imagery to create expressive windows is notable in the \textit{Song of St Francis} (1934) [Figure 152], at Queen’s College Chapel, the University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria. In the window pink roses and purple irises are discernible on the left-hand side, behind the pelican. Stylised floral forms feature higher up in the window, behind St Francis’ torso and halo. Some of these may be depictions of native Australian paper daisies (on the right hand side, below St Francis’ left hand), while others are indiscernible floral forms and foliage.\textsuperscript{778} As this window shows, Waller made extensive use of natural imagery in a manner that demonstrated her love of the natural world, yet her interpretation of the Arts and Crafts concept of ‘truth to nature’ was personal and saw her celebrate the beauty of nature through symbolic spiritual expression.

Also connected to her esteem for nature, Waller recognised that inclusion of stained-glass within architecture came about because of its ability to modulate the amount of natural light entering the building, most significantly in churches. Given the prominent position allocated to light within the Christian faith, stained glass has, historically, been favoured for church architecture due to its ability to enhance its environment through the modulation of natural light.\textsuperscript{779} Not simply intended to bring the parishioner into contact with religious narratives, stained glass, given its

\textsuperscript{776} The year after she made this book she introduced expressive irises into an illustration, and she used stylised irises in a symbolic manner in The Golden Faun from \textit{The Great Breath}.

\textsuperscript{777} Whall, Stained Glass Work, p. 231.

\textsuperscript{778} A loose page in My Book of Flowers (1920) features six drawings of native plants and, though her daisies are not included, the drawings demonstrate a rare instance when she engaged with native Australian plants.

\textsuperscript{779} In the Book of Genesis, God’s first act is to declare “Let there be light”. Light is also associated with the grace of God, given its power to transform the physical world. The corollary of this is God’s ability to take light from the world, and plunge humankind into darkness.

\textsuperscript{“Genesis”, 1: 3, in: King James Bible Online.}

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dependence on natural light to achieve its full impact, also connects these narratives with the so-called ‘light of heaven’, as discussed in Chapter One. White light is composed of the full spectrum of colours, and natural light illuminates all that it comes into contact with. Loverance has noted that these properties of light have long been associated with the grace of God. As a result of her understanding of this principle, and her own spiritual interests, Waller’s stained glass exemplifies the medium’s potential to serve as a modulator of light that encourages spiritual contemplation as her essay “A Stained-Glass Window” revealed.

Waller put her theories regarding the importance of light into practice. In her correspondence with Bishop Wylde regarding the windows for St Ambrose, Gilgandra, she queried whether she had created windows suitable for the climate: “Did the windows seem right for [the] light? You have a much stronger light over there than we have here—so I wonder if I have them too glassy or whether they are just right”. While Wylde’s response does not survive, in the windows Waller created for the church she successfully created windows that, even in harsh sunlight, modulated light entering the chapel.

The two windows, which have not previously been analysed by scholars, each feature a central figure, Christ and the Good Shepherd, which has been executed with pale, semi-translucent glass. Larger pieces of irregularly-shaped glass in bold colours form the background, while bands of pale glass with the name of each window sit at the front of the windows and wrap around each of their legs. The glass surrounding them is darker and larger than other examples of Waller’s work produced for Victorian churches in the 1930s, while the their robes appear lighter. She was taking into account the harsher light in Gilgandra and sought to ensure that the central figure would glow, using the background to give contrast and ground the narrative. Indeed, the idiosyncratic use of larger pieces of glass is probably what she was referring to in her letter to Wylde, when she queried whether the windows were “too glassy”.

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780 Loverance, Christian Art, p. 77.
781 Christian Waller to Bishop A. L. Wylde, 30 November 1934, Correspondence: Stained-Glass Windows in the Chapel of the Resurrection.

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Waller’s ability to create striking windows of both a small and large scale highlights her strength in this area. One of her most impressive windows, which is also one of her smallest, is *St Peter’s Sermon on the Morning of Pentecost* (1936) [Figure 4], located in the baptistery of the Littlejohn Memorial Chapel, Scotch College Chapel, Hawthorn, Victoria. Here Waller employed her distinctive bold colour scheme to complement the translucent colours of the central figure of Christ, as she had in *Christ the King of All Nations*. When viewed in the context of its location within the church, it becomes clear Waller’s choice of colour came about through the necessity to permit light into the dark space. As it is the only window located in the Chapel’s baptistery—which is itself a particularly dark area of the church given its separation from the aisle—it is solely responsible for illuminating the space. An image of the baptistery [Figure 153] demonstrates how Waller’s use of bold, solid colours lights the space.

*St Peter’s Sermon on the Morning of Pentecost* evinces Waller’s understanding of the dual function of ecclesiastic stained glass: the modulation of light and the expression of spiritual themes. In “A Stained-Glass Window”, Waller acknowledged the importance of recognising the former, despite the temptation to focus on the latter: “light must enter the building”. 782 Essentially, Waller stressed the importance of recognising that, although a solid medium, the distinguishing characteristic of glass is its translucency.

The baptistery window was intended to be spiritually uplifting to the school-aged boys who frequented the chapel. 783 Upon examination it becomes clear that Waller did ‘think’ in glass when developing its design. The lines and shapes within the composition along with the colours selected emphasise the capacity for the window

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783 This could have been a pious hope, given that chapel attendance was compulsory.
to act as a modulator of light. Light enhances the colour scheme and symbolic expression of *St Peter’s Sermon on the Morning of Pentecost*. It is perhaps the most striking and affecting window Waller created due in part to Waller’s sensitivity to the setting. This would not have been achieved had Waller created the work without its architectural setting in mind. The colours have a calming effect that corresponds with the ritual of baptism, which it oversees. These cool colours allow soft, dappled light into the space, and are not harsh and overbearing. This awareness of Arts and Crafts principles, explains how Waller set about her practice. It reveals that she distinguished between the mediums in which she worked when conceiving her designs, and, in the case of stained glass, she considered the environment for which it was designed.

Whall’s treatise offered the tools for Waller to learn the key elements of successful stained glass design, including the importance of natural light. In *Stained Glass Work* he repeatedly referred to the necessity of understanding the light conditions the window will be located within, including the fact that it will be surrounded by the dark materials: “when the window is in its place, each light will be surrounded with stone or brick, which, although not so black as the lead-lines, will tell as a strong dark against the glass” 784. A photograph [Figure 125] of Waller working in her stained glass studio at her home in Fairy Hills, Ivanhoe, Victoria shows that she followed Whall’s directive and imitated church conditions when designing her windows. The photograph shows a three-light window hung up against a large window in the room; brown paper has been placed around the windows to give the effect of them being located within a brick recess of a church. In his book, Whall suggested that brown paper be placed around glass whilst it is being painted to “get the thing quite near to its future conditions”. 785 Waller’s study and appreciation of nature—including the way in which light interacts with different materials and colours—was an important dimension of her Arts and Crafts practice in stained glass that equipped her to be an independent artist.

785 Ibid.
Waller’s approach espoused Whall’s conviction that stained glass artists needed to possess a comprehensive understanding of glass as well as art. In *Stained Glass Work*
he bemoaned the trend of artists turning towards stained glass with little knowledge of the technical processes of the medium. Indeed, a number of artists, trained in other media, especially painting—such as Burne-Jones and Morris—designed for stained glass in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth.\(^{786}\)

In a 1948 interview for the *Woman's Magazine* supplement of Melbourne’s *Argus* newspaper—that was accompanied by a pictures of her at work [Figures 154–58]—Waller expressed a similar view to Christopher Whall’s in *Stained Glass Work* when she described herself as being responsible for the entire process behind her stained-glass windows. Commenting that she was asked to design a cartoon for someone (most likely William Montgomery), Waller observed that “Once I started this I saw it was necessary to carry out the whole thing”.\(^{787}\) This indicates that Waller not only made the stained glass, but her role extended to the transportation, installation and insurance of the windows; something she touched on at the end of her essay.\(^{788}\) Correspondence with the Bishop of St Ambrose’s, Gilgandra, suggests her frustration at being unable to oversee the installation herself or be involved in the engagement of a local glazier to install her windows and wire guards to protect them. In a letter sent c. June 1934 she wrote: “I should think it advisable to get someone experienced to put the windows in”, and suggested hiring someone from a bigger town, probably because it was unlikely that anyone local would have installed a stained-glass window before.\(^{789}\) Her desire to master the whole of the creative process is characteristic of the Arts and Crafts movement, which saw integrity of design as integral to the quality of the artwork.

Waller’s personally expressive approach to stained glass signals her self-identification as an independent artist. Veronica Whall likely encouraged this, as she referred to stained glass as an art form and advocated mastery of the different elements of making stained glass. She also encouraged artists to develop their own aesthetic and advised them against imitating medieval glass “for we must always press forward and prove things for ourselves”.\(^{790}\) Although responding to commissions when producing her work, Waller included distinct personal symbolism in her windows.\(^{791}\)

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\(^{789}\) Whall, “Glass, Lead, and—Light,” pp. 10, 14

For example the three-light window at St Matthew’s Anglican Church, Prahran, Victoria, *Penitence, Pardon and Peace* (1936) [Figure 159] features imagery also seen in Waller’s printed books *The Great Breath* and *The Gates of Dawn*, which, were created four years before in 1932.

Design parallels between Waller’s prints and stained-glass windows reveal that Waller did not approach her stained-glass windows as isolated artworks but conceived them as part of her œuvre. *Penitence, Pardon and Peace* combines orthodox Christian imagery with her personal symbolism. Together the windows represent the journey towards spiritual enlightenment through, symbolised by the dark, muted glass in the *Penitence* light, the brighter, warm colours and solar symbolism in the *Pardon* light, through the mystical atmosphere conjured by the purple glass and stars in the *Peace* light.\(^{792}\) In this way the work embraces Christopher Whall’s assertion that stained glass should not simply mimic nature or attempt to recast a historical style, but should draw on these forces to create new and imaginative works. As he articulated in *Stained Glass Work*, using italics to emphasise his point: “There should be no full realism of any kind. No violent action must assert itself in a window.”\(^{793}\) Here she did not attempt to follow a tradition, but rather has drawn on convention to make a personal statement.

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\(^{792}\) Miley also remarked on Waller’s expressive use of colour in *Penitence, Pardon and Peace*.
Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” p. 47.

\(^{793}\) Whall kept various plants and insects in his studio, which provided a connection to the natural world and gave his students an opportunity to draw inspiration for their ornament from the real thing.
Peace is illustrative of this cross-referencing. In the light Waller depicts a shepherd standing with his staff, dressed in traditional Hebrew robes that feature a Greek pattern on the hems. Several six-pointed stars executed in pastel coloured glass surround him. Bands of geometric glass wrap around his legs and in the background, contributing rhythm and movement to the window. In the foreground two lilies are depicted and a large eagle is located in the top of the window behind the Shepherd’s head. All these symbols are featured in The Gates of Dawn. In one illustration, the design motif is employed in the form of a canopy that frames an image of the boy, Christopher standing with the Daughter of the Sun [Figure 160]. The image represents a point in the story when Christopher transforms from a boy into a man, which as discussed in Chapter Three, symbolises his spiritual evolution. He stands front on with his palms open and resting either side of his body; he holds a peace lily in his right and a flute in his left. The rainbow-like band of shapes is situated behind his and the Daughter of the Sun’s heads, and includes eagles, clusters of straight lines (which could symbolise a rainbow, though the print does not include colour), floral forms, stars and circles.

Uncharacteristically, Waller included a modern cityscape in the Penitence window; it is one of the few representations of the modern world found in her œuvre. The cityscape

794 The use of bands of geometric forms is also seen in three designs for secular stained glass Waller made c. 1932–35: Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach, Cupid and Psyche (Design for Stained-Glass Window) and East of the Sun and West of the Moon. The last was the only design to be translated into a stained-glass window. Similar curvilinear bands filled with shapes such as stars and stylised flowers are also featured in a number of Waller’s prints, including the bookplate she designed for Pate in 1932.
may have been included to represent the modern world and its inferiority to the ‘higher truths’ that those engaged in alternative spiritual enquiry sought to access. The figure is shown forlorn and contemplative, signifying a state of penitence. Reading the windows left to right, it becomes apparent that Waller highlighted that, through the act of penitence, the individual can transcend the modern physical world and enter a higher plane of being. In the central light, *Pardon*, the Christ-like individual bathes in light from the sun. Rectangular pieces of orange glass placed at the top of the head suggest the energy and wisdom of the sun (the heavens above) are being implanted into the figure who stands erect with his arms by his side and his palms open, showing his receptiveness to the sunrays. The background of *Peace* also evokes a cosmic reality through the choice of vibrant pastel colours for the stars and bold blue—inflected with hints of green—in the sky. These light colours contrast with the *Penitence* light, where sombre shades dominate.

This explicit reference to the physical world demonstrates Waller’s intention to create stained glass of the highest artistic standards to communicate her spiritual values. Whall and Whall Ltd’s teachings facilitated this objective in that they combined thorough grounding in the medium and tradition of stained glass, and encouraged individual expression. Waller presented a new interpretation of it, and thus demonstrates her mastery of the medium, which necessitated the development of a personal aesthetic.

**Truth to Architecture**

Harmony between the stained-glass window and its architectural setting is one of Whall’s four key aspects of successful stained glass that Waller’s work achieved. Ecclesiastical stained-glass windows have the potential to act as a powerful point of contact between the viewer and the spiritual ideas they express, while cultivating a spiritual atmosphere within the church. This requires respect for the basic function of stained glass: to serve as a window in the church, not as a painted image. Waller acknowledged this condition in “A Stained-Glass Window”, observing “There is an opening to fill, not a picture to make”. 795 As such, she was acutely aware of the

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primacy of the architectural setting when devising the design and colour scheme of her stained glass.

Waller’s understanding of the importance of designing stained glass for its architectural environment came about through research into the medium’s history and her overseas travels in 1929-30. Upon her return to Australia she observed that:

I do not think there is a piece of old glass in England we did not see, though we might have had to walk miles to see it. Most of all we loved the wonderful Five Sisters windows in York Minster, which were restored as a memorial to the women who gave their lives during the war. They came up against the light like one beautiful shining mass of silver and mother of pearl. We found ourselves coming back to them again and again. York Minster is a wonderful place in which to study old glass. The twelfth century glass in Canterbury Cathedral was the first old glass that we saw, and it absolutely thrilled us. The Mecca of stained glass artists is, however, Chartres Cathedral, in France. In England there are very few cathedrals that have all their glass complete. In Chartres it is all perfect, window after window glowing with rich colour, and the effect is enhanced by the dimness of the great aisles.796

The study of medieval and Arts and Crafts stained glass was an important objective of her trip overseas in 1929 and was complemented by visits to churches across in England, Ireland, Italy and France, walking in the footsteps of other Arts and Crafts practitioners, including Whall. In a passage in his diary, John Tallis discussed a trip he made with the Wallers to Canterbury Cathedral. Tallis wrote about another trip with the Wallers to Westminster Abbey in London.797

Waller’s emphasis on “old glass” indicates that she was primarily concerned with seeing medieval glass during her travels, given that she was unable to do so in Australia.798 The great Gothic and Medieval cathedrals she visited in England and in France featured stained glass produced specifically for the building, often in the cathedral's workshops. The windows were unlike the majority of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century stained glass in Australia, whether imported or locally made.

796 “Cathedral Windows,” p. 28.
798 British colonists introduced the medium in the nineteenth century. The earliest example of figurative stained glass is an 1842 window by the firm William Wailes, located in Christ Church, Longford, Tasmania.
A fine example of medieval glass that Waller saw during her travels in 1929–30 is the *Notre Dame de la belle verrière* (Our Lady of the Beautiful Window) [Figure 161], (original construction c. 1145–55; reconstructed c. 1194–1220) in Chartres Cathedral, Chartres, France. The image of an enthroned Madonna with baby Jesus on her lap covers four panels horizontally from the top of the window, with the surrounding panels depicting scenes from the life of Christ and tributes to Mary and Jesus. The section depicting the Madonna is the most celebrated aspect of the window, praised for the intense blue glass used for her robes, the overall quality of the glass, and the technique used to create the window. The visual impact of the window is strengthened by the mosaic technique, which is notable in the panels depicting the enthroned Madonna: her blue robes are intensified by the use of small pieces of blue glass so that, when illuminated, they bounce off one another, causing the window to glow. By seeing this and other windows, Waller enhanced her understanding of how the window interacted with its architectural environment.

She expressed her conviction of the dependence of stained glass on its architectural setting in her essay written just a year after her return to Australia, observing that “the window is a minor part of a complete structure, so its lines and character should conform architecturally with the whole building”.

This view echoed Christopher Whall’s, who instilled in his pupils the belief that:

> Stained-glass is not an independent art. It is an accessory to architecture, and any limitations imposed by structure and architectural propriety of necessity are most gravely to be considered and not lightly laid on one side.

His daughter also reminded pupils that a stained-glass window is “part of a wall of a church”. The importance Waller placed on approaching stained glass with its setting in mind contributed to the strength of her work.

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Williams’ repeated engagement of Waller to complete stained glass for his churches demonstrates his deep admiration for her work and her respect for its architectural environment. His preference for Waller is even more remarkable given that she worked slowly on her windows and was often significantly behind on her commissions. He valued quality over the speed and cost of the windows, as the works would have been produced more quickly if he had commissioned a firm or a practitioner who worked in a firm with assistants. On occasions he defended her slowness to commissioners telling them the window would be worth waiting for.

Waller’s stained glass for St James’, Ivanhoe exemplifies the way in which she responded to the architectural environment when designing her windows. She completed seven windows for the church in 1938—five apse windows, plus the two female saints on the face of the chancel arch—when it underwent major renovations under Williams’ guidance. She went on to create a total of sixteen windows. The subjects of these windows include St Agnes [Figure 162] and St Cecilia [Figure 163], and feature some of the finest examples of Waller’s treatment of women in her stained glass.

Of particular interest are the five other windows Waller designed for the apse. The windows are each located on adjacent walls, which collectively form the semicircular chancel. The window openings are modest in size, not allowing for a large and

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complex design. Waller responded to this setting by designing five windows that depict similar episodes from the life of Christ. In each window, including *I am the Bread of Life* [Figure 164], the Christ figure dominates, and there is minimal background detail. Semi-abstracted, geometric pieces of coloured glass compose the background, thereby emphasising the importance of the Christ figure, whose features are painted in great detail. Essentially, the five windows illuminate the space below, where the parishioners look to during church services. The colour scheme is designed to modulate light, inflected with the warm tones of the glass that cultivate an uplifting atmosphere conducive to spiritual contemplation.

In a letter dating from the late 1930s to Williams concerning the chancel windows at St James’, Waller expressed her desire to remove a window in order that she may be able to “do a little extra” on it, presumably to make slight alternation so it looked better in the space. Willing to forgo financial gain in favour of the best artistic result, she even offered to pay for the process out of her own expenses. In another letter Waller described her experience of entering St James’: “There is a wonderful feeling of peace in the church...you always get that in your churches.” This comment indicates that Waller personally responded to the spiritual atmosphere of churches and was conscious of the way in which this environment affected the role of the window as a point of contact between the viewer and the spiritual concepts it was designed to express.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have analysed the way Christian Waller’s ecclesiastical stained-glass windows espoused her commitment to Arts and Crafts values and her objective to produce art with a spiritual message. These ideals were distilled from the nineteenth-century revival of stained glass in Britain, through the Gothic Revival and the British

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805 Ibid.
Arts and Crafts Movement. The legacy of this revival, as well as Melbourne Arts and Crafts stained glass during the first third of the twentieth century, has been examined. The chapter has brought the technical and aesthetic brilliance of Waller’s stained glass into focus, and positioned this as a direct reflection of both her spiritual engagement and commitment to Arts and Crafts values of stained glass production.

Waller’s stained glass espouses four key Arts and Crafts principles that were advanced by Christopher and Veronica Whall: truth to materials; truth to nature; the independent mastery of the practitioner; and architectural fitness. Each of these enriched the aesthetic experience of the stained-glass window, thereby enhancing its potential to communicate religious themes and cultivate a spiritual atmosphere.

Firstly, her considered use of colour and design shows respect for the distinct material qualities of the medium, particularly coloured glass. Secondly through an understanding of the primary function of stained glass Waller’s windows allowed for the themes to be illuminated by natural light. Thirdly, she mastered each stage of the process of making stained glass, and created a distinct personal aesthetic. And finally, by considering the architectural environment for which it is intended, the window complemented the function of the church. As a result, Waller’s stained glass is characterised by a holistic design and expression that reflect the central role of spirituality in her life and her drive to produce spiritually inspiring stained-glass windows.

The following chapter, Chapter Six, considers the art—including stained glass—that Christian and Napier Waller produced in collaboration.
Chapter Six

Traces of Collaboration: Christian and Napier Waller’s Artistic Partnership

Figure 165: Unknown photographer, Untitled [Christian Waller and Napier Waller at Fairy Hills], 1922, gelatin silver photograph, c. 8.5 x 8.5 cm, Waller House, Ivanhoe
The previous chapter considered Waller’s Arts and Crafts approach to stained glass. In this chapter I argue that the Wallers enjoyed a mutually influential, collaborative relationship that saw them complete a number of monumental artworks. These are mostly attributed to one artist, predominately Napier Waller. I show that the established view in Australian art history that he significantly influenced his wife’s artistic development is narrow, and fails to adequately represent Christian Waller’s artistic accomplishments and objectives, and those of her husband.

The first major collaboration was the Waller House (1920–22, with extensions added in the late-1920s and in the 1930s) that the couple designed and had custom-built in Ivanhoe. New evidence I have located proves that, although the Wallers individually designed different elements of the interior furnishings and garden beds of their house, these contributed to an overall aesthetic that was informed by a shared vision. The couple went on to collaborate on monumental artworks in the 1920s and 1930s, including the *Five Lamps of Learning* (1931) mosaic at Winthrop Hall, the University of Western Australia, the *Leckie Window* (1935), made for Wilson Hall at the University of Melbourne (now located in the Ian Potter Museum of Art) and the murals in the *Myer Mural Hall*, Myer Emporium, Melbourne (1935). Drawing on principles of Connoisseurship, analysis of preparatory sketches and primary ephemera provides evidence of Christian Waller’s direct involvement with these major works, yet her contribution until now has not received formal recognition.

Reappraisal of artworks the Wallers produced in collaboration raises the issue of authorship. Specifically, to what extent should these works be recognised as having been created by both Christian and Napier Waller? The corollary of this question is to what extent these works should be viewed as independent creations, conceived by one with the minor assistance of the other? In this chapter, I investigate the situation where the role of an assistant merges into that of a co-creator, a collaborator. A significant amount of anecdotal evidence I have uncovered alludes to Christian Waller’s direct involvement in many major works currently attributed to Napier Waller. Other evidence strongly points to collaboration and, in some instances, to misattribution, such as the presence of Christian Waller’s handwriting and drawings on works attributed to her husband in public collections. There has been relatively
little research on this matter, other than speculative accounts of the Wallers’
collaborative efforts.806 Conversely, I have found Napier Waller’s handwriting within
Christian Waller’s sketchbooks as well as evidence that suggests he made windows to
her designs, mainly during the 1940s, when health problems and a backlog of work
prevented her from completing commissions. The discovery of this evidence
necessitates a re-evaluation of monumental work by both Christian and Napier
Waller.

I draw on theories of artistic collaboration to assist with analysis of the Wallers’
collaborative dynamic. These include those advanced by social theorist Vera John-
Steiner, whose book Creative Collaboration (2000) explored the dynamics of mutability
in generative practices, including art making.807 The intent is not to assess the merits
of each artist but rather to establish a framework for fully appraising the scope of
Christian Waller’s artistic output, including the works she produced in collaboration
with her husband.

Artists and Theories of Collaboration

Creative collaboration between heterosexual spouses like the Wallers complicates the
determination of authorship in relation to the conception, design and execution of
works of art. John-Steiner’s theories of collaboration outlined in Creative Collaboration
explore this issue as it affects the paradigm of the collaborative artist couple. It serves
as a useful theoretical framework for assessing the collaborative work of Christian
and Napier Waller.

In her research on creative collaboration, John-Steiner identified two types of
collaboration: integrative collaboration and complementary collaboration.808 The former sees
the collaborators synthesise their aesthetics, a process that leads to the creation of a
new style or work that could not be achieved independently. This process transforms
the collaborators’ individual aesthetics and their field of activity. The latter,

806 See: Draffin, “Shared Symbols, Private and Public: Christian and Napier Waller,” pp. 50-51; Tracey Smith, “Creative Relationships within the
Australian House Museum” (University of Melbourne, 2006), pp. 61-62.
808 Ibid., p. 70.
complementary collaboration, by contrast, consists of a division of labour based on skill. Participants each complete a portion of the workload and support the other to achieve a common goal.

On a larger scale, an example of complementary collaboration is the execution of large-scale projects, such as monumental artworks, which involve architects, artists and labourers, and other practitioners. The division of labour amongst stained glass firms that Christopher Whall abhorred, as discussed in the previous chapter, is an example of complementary collaboration. Instances where Napier Waller helped completed some of Christian Waller’s stained glass commissions, as discussed later in this chapter and in Appendix D, also falls into this category. Changes to individual styles may result, though the impact is not as significant as that seen through a process of integrative collaboration.

The Wallers’ collaborative relationship, I argue, was primarily an example of integrative collaboration. They fused their styles together when collaborating, which is why it can be difficult to differentiate their individual works. This is seen in major commissions such as The Leckie Window (1935) that combine techniques and motifs favoured by Christian and Napier Waller respectively, as detailed later in this chapter. Aside from the Waller House, the couple’s collaboration occurred in relation to monumental art. It is evidenced by the multiple instances where they each contributed to a design, a drawing and even worked out of the same sketchbook.

Their relationship conforms to John-Steiner’s view of a highly-successful collaborative relationship between spouses: “The full realization of intimacy and interdependence is achieved by those intimates who share a common vision and devotion to shared tasks”.809 This common vision—as expressed in the architecture, bespoke furnishings and garden beds at the Waller House—drew together their shared personal, spiritual and aesthetic values. The house held deep significance for each artist as both a home and the place where they made their art. For the Wallers, it served as a tangible example of what their combined creative powers could achieve.

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809 Ibid., p. 32.
Artist Couples and Myths of Creation

The Wallers’ collaborative relationship is by no means an isolated case within art history. Rejecting the concept of aesthetic individualism, philosopher R. G. Collingwood argued that all art is collaborative.810 The privileging of aesthetic individualism in Western arts since the Italian Renaissance (14th–15th centuries) raises the issues of value. Different contributions to a work of art are ranked in terms of importance, and this hierarchy reflects social values.811 As such, contributions of female artists to collaborative works produced with male spouses exemplifies issues of authorship associated with artistic collaboration, given the marginalisation of women artists throughout the history of Western art.812 Since the 1970s, feminist art historians have reappraised the collaborative dynamics of numerous heterosexual artist couples.813 In many instances, this has led to the repositioning of the female counterpart from the periphery to the centre of the creative process.

Scholarship on heterosexual artist couples has, in some cases, revealed the significant roles played by less-prominent female spouses of male artists who have been promoted as protagonists of the story of modern art.814 To name just a few, these include Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979), wife of Robert Delaunay (1885–1941); Marion Mahony Griffin, wife of Walter Burley Griffin (1876–1937); Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, wife of Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928) and Ethel Carrick Fox (1872–1951), wife of Emanuel Philips Fox (1865–1915). In the case of these artist couples, they collaborated to varying degrees and their work was informed by spiritual thinking. However, in each case the male artist, during their period of activity, received greater attention for work produced collaboratively. This tendency to marginalise or ignore entirely the contributions of the women artists reflects historic gender attitudes that the women themselves engaged with by promoting their spouse’s work ahead of their own.

Since the 1990s, scholars have approached the issue of collaborative partnerships from different angles. This includes analysis of the complexity and dual roles in

collaborative partnerships. The series of essays, *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership* (1993), edited by Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron, is exemplary of this approach. In the introduction to *Significant Others*, they assert that the essays do not conform to feminist approaches to artist couples but instead explore myths about creation, collaboration and artist couples. The book debunks the notion that there can only be one—invariably male—‘genius’ in an artist couple, and that the (female) spouse of the (male) ‘genius’ produced derivative work. Chadwick and de Courtivron’s essay—and the associated publication—highlights the dynamism of collaborative relationships and the gendered nature of artistic creation as male, in contrast with biological creation, which is gendered as female. It also explores the social stereotypes artist couples operate within and analyses its implications on their work.

As with John-Steiner’s *Creative Collaboration, Creative Partnerships* offers a useful conceptual framework for approaching the Wallers’ collaborative artistic relationship. They had a relationship that cannot be defined by stereotypes of gender and marriage, nor can their collaborative work be neatly divided into certain works and certain periods of time. This was acknowledged by Thomas when he curated *The Art of Christian Waller*. In the exhibition proposal he observed that: “there is evidence of considerable collaboration. Further investigation may prove that Christian contributed a great deal to the success of Napier Waller’s work”. This is due in part to the fact the couple worked together on monumental artworks, the dearth of personal correspondence and other ephemera, and because they accepted commissions individually, yet collaborated at various stages in the creative process; in some cases this was probably unknown to those who commissioned the work. Furthermore, I argue that Christian Waller did not pursue critical acclaim from the art she produced with her husband, instead seeking to create artworks that inspired and uplifted the viewer by communicating her spiritual values. She may also have believed that her husband’s reputation—and their main source of income—would be diminished if her involvement in his major works became widely known.

815 Ibid.
A Meeting of Two Minds: The Wallers at the National Gallery Art School

Christian and Napier Waller had a romantic and artistic relationship that was forged on shared values and interests. They came together in their late teens, when they were still developing their artistic visions. I argue that they influenced and inspired one another to reach their full potential as artists. This explains why they were able to work together so successfully, exemplifying John-Steiner’s concept of integrative collaboration, as evidenced by the visual sympathies in their œuvres, particularly during their first two decades of marriage.

Each from regional Victoria, as discussed in Chapter One, the Wallers met when they were students at the National Gallery Art School in Melbourne in the years leading up to the First World War. They married on 21 October 1915 at St Andrew’s Manse in Carlton, Victoria. The wedding certificate lists Napier and Christian’s professions as artists and their ages as twenty-two and twenty-one respectively. Like many couples of that time, they did not have a conventional start to married life, as Napier Waller was living at army barracks, having enlisted to serve in the First World War on 31 August 1915; he embarked to France on 20 May 1916.

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817 Napier gifted Christian a book about the artist George Frederic Watts for Christmas 1913, and inscribed it with the message “Wishing Chrissie a merry Xmas & Happy New Year, Mervyn 1913”.

La Scala, “Inventory—Napier Waller Library—9 Crown Road Ivanhoe,” p. 5.


In the year of their marriage, they each contributed ‘decorations’ to *Melba’s Gift Book of Australian Art and Literature*, which reveal their common interest in myths and legends. Napier Waller’s contribution is a black pen and ink drawing that accompanied the poem *The Women’s Part* by Will Lawson [Figure 166]. The illustration evokes the atmosphere of the poem, which describes a scene where soldiers depart by ship for war, while women “wait and pray” to see their loved ones again. Napier Waller’s interest in drawing on myth and symbolism to explore contemporary issues—such as the horrors of war—is evidenced by the medieval attire the woman wears: a long, flowing gown. Additionally, he has not drawn the ship in the style of a 1916 troop carrier but as a medieval ship, discernible by its elaborate sails, which he emphasises by showing the ship swaying to the right, indicating it is being powered by wind.

Christian Waller’s illustration in *Melba’s Gift Book* [Figure 38], as discussed in Chapter Three, is also based on myth and legend. Unlike Napier Waller’s contribution, it does not relate to the literary piece it has been placed alongside. Her illustration, as discussed in Chapter Two, was inspired by the Ancient Greek myth associated with the river Lethe. It has a deeper mystical bent than her husband’s work.

The Wallers’ contributions to *Melba’s Gift Book* demonstrate that, even in their early days as a couple, they produced work inspired by similar literary themes. However, they expressed these in a manner that reflected their individual values and interests: Napier Waller’s work deals with a humanistic vision of grief and despair, drawing on medievalism to symbolise a modern malady; whereas Christian Waller created a layered narrative, drawn from myth and ancient history with a symbolic meaning not immediately obvious to the viewer, thereby inviting individual interpretation.\(^2\) Using their contributions to this book as points of comparison, it is clear the Wallers had their own approach to art making, yet in some instances, their interests and values overlapped.

A biographical sketch of Napier Waller assists in understanding his work; including that which he produced collaboratively with his wife. He was born and raised in the

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\(^2\) The narrative may have been chosen to symbolise reincarnation of soldiers who died at war, as drinking the water of the river Lethe and the subsequent erasure of memories was associated with death and reincarnation.
small town of Penshurst in Western Victoria.\textsuperscript{821} His father, William Waller, farmed
dairy and sheep and Napier Waller left school at the age of fourteen to work on the
family farm.\textsuperscript{822} He recalled in a 1965 interview with oral historian Hazel de Berg that
he “led a very normal boyish life roaming over the paddocks” at Penshurst.\textsuperscript{823} His
nostalgic appreciation for the pastoral landscape is expressed throughout his \emph{œuvre}, in
particular through prints of farmyard animals. The colour linocut \textit{Bantams} (1932)
[Figure 167], for example, highlights the natural beauty and physical strength of the
farm animal. The print pays homage to Waller’s youth while demonstrating his skills
with the modern method of linocut printmaking from multiple blocks.

![Figure 167: Napier Waller, \textit{Bantams}, c. 1932, linocut printed in colour from multiple blocks, 27.6 x 39.2 cm (image), National
Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1976](image)

It was while growing up on the farm that Waller became mesmerised by the legends
of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. It was also during this period
that Waller first read Sir Thomas Malory’s Arthurian novel, \textit{Le Morte D’Arthur} (1485),
a work that yielded major cultural influence in Britain and its colonies towards the
end of the nineteenth century, with this influence pervading into the twentieth
century.\textsuperscript{824} During his childhood he drew visions roused by his readings of this book,
as well as the works of William Morris and other Victorian writers who explored the
Legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.\textsuperscript{825} He realised these
more fully when he began formal art training in Melbourne in 1913.

For Napier Waller, his student years were a happy time, as he reflected later in his
life:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{821} Penshurst is located 279 kilometers west of Melbourne.
\item \textsuperscript{822} Draffin, \textit{The Art of M. Napier Waller}, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{823} Napier Waller, “Napier Waller Interviewed by Hazel de Berg.” In Hazel De Berg Collection. Canberra: The National Library of Australia, 1965.
\item \textsuperscript{824} Faxon, “The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as Knights of the Round Table,” p. 95.
\item \textsuperscript{825} Draffin, \textit{The Art of M. Napier Waller}, p. 8.
\end{itemize}
Looking back over those early student years, I think I had very fortunate and
happy companionship with a number of fellow-students and they, I feel, have
been probably a very important part of my continual recollections. Waller’s comment alludes to the profound legacy of these companions on his life
and, no doubt, his art practice. Christian Waller (then Yandell) was one of these
companions, as was John Trinick and William ‘Mont’ Montgomery. At the School,
Napier Waller followed the traditional course of studying in the drawing school and
then progressing to the prestigious painting school. He was a gifted draughtsman and
won seven student prizes in 1913. He spent just one year studying under Frederick
McCubbin before moving to the painting school in 1914, where he joined his future
wife. The fact that Christian and Napier Waller met during their student years
renders her the most significant and influential of the unnamed companions
mentioned in his interview with de Berg.

The Wallers’ interest in Pre-Raphaelitism was a point in common. Christian Waller,
as established in Chapter Two, expressed an interest in medieval, mythological and
historical themes that was informed by Pre-Raphaelitism during her student years in
Bendigo. However, scholars have perpetuated the myth that Napier Waller
introduced her to mythological themes. Her previously discussed 1909 paintings A
Petition and A Lady of Thermopylae [Figures 23–24], for example, drew on Greek
legend and a sketchbook she kept at the time included references to Classical
mythology. Accordingly, I argue that the Wallers shared an interest in mythology that
was mediated through Pre-Raphaelitism.

This included Arthurian myths and legends, which Christian Waller was acquainted
with before meeting her husband. Given that Napier Waller did not move to
Melbourne until 1913, Christian Waller’s ownership of a copy of Tennyson’s
collected works alone indicates she was exposed to romantic interpretations of
medieval legends. Claims Napier Waller ‘introduced’ her to Arthurian legends
express gender bias and neglect the widespread influence these themes continued to
yield in twentieth-century Australia. Tennyson’s poetry drew inspiration from the medieval legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and this influence was particularly notable in his series of narrative poems *Idylls of the King* (1859–85). Tennyson’s medieval-inspired poetry enjoyed extreme popularity in Britain and America, with this popularity expressed through illustrations and artistic responses, mural painting and decorative arts, as much as in the wide readership of his texts. It was considered the high point of Medievalism, which was closely associated with British cultural identity. His previously-discussed poem *The Lady of Shalott*, for example, inspired paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt—among others—with reproductions of artworks another way the Wallers could have encountered these popular themes.

An example of Napier Waller’s engagement with Pre-Raphaelitism is seen in his illustration *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1915) [Figure 168], inspired by a passage from Keats’s 1819 poem of the same name. The poem explores the destructive nature of love, highlighting the seductive powers of women. It is considered to have been the catalyst for the establishment of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Waller concentrated on the tenth stanza of the twelfth-stanza poem, and includes the text of the stanza beneath the image:

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors death-pale were they all;
They cried—‘La Belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!’ 836

By emphasising the power La Belle Dame yields over the hapless Knight, his artwork highlights what has been described as the dark, sinister side of Pre-Raphaelitism and the concept of femmes fatales that La Belle Dame Sans Merci inspired.837 Waller portrayed the Knight lying against the roots of a tree, appearing to have fallen backwards and discarding his helmet sword. He appears entranced, emphasised by the slant of his back and the lifelessness of his outstretched legs. La Belle Dame is kneeling to his left, and wraps her long red hair around him. The vibrant orange-red tones of her low-cut dress stand out amongst the otherwise muted tones of the watercolour, signalling her dominance in the narrative. Behind the couple faces of the death-pale warriors appear semi-camouflaged amongst the trees. They look on the scene in horror, yet are symbolically hiding in the trees, not wishing to rescue to Knight and risk falling under La Belle Dame’s spell.

Figure 169: Napier Waller, Virgil, 1922, watercolour over pencil on paper on cardboard, 56.5 x 72.6 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1922

Clearly, Christian and Napier Waller were inspired by the ideals of Pre-Raphaelitism and engaged with Arthurian and Classical mythology in the art they produced during their first decade of marriage. As Nicholas Draffin has noted, Christian Waller’s early work featured Classical themes, whereas Napier Waller’s referenced Arthurian narratives. Around the time of their marriage, these preferences swapped, with Napier Waller engaging with Classical themes in works such as the watercolour Virgil (1922) [Figure 169], and Christian Waller immersing herself in Arthurian narratives, expressed in the 1922 watercolour Morgan le Fay and King Uriens [Figure 94] that was analysed in the previous chapter. This reinforces the literary connection, a feature

that characterised both Christian and Napier Waller’s art. Napier Waller included a passage from the poem in the frame at the base of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.

While Christian Waller engaged with Arthurian and mythological themes between 1915 and 1926, her work had a more mystical tone than her husband’s that reflected her deepening interest in symbolic spiritual expression. Like him, she embraced the theme of the powerful woman drawn from literature at this time, seen in illustrations like *Destiny* (c. 1922) [Figure 47].

The poem explores the lack of control individuals often have over their destiny, implying that one’s destiny is in the hands of a higher power. Waller’s response sees her sister, Florence Selater, assume the persona of Destiny from the poem it accompanied. Destiny is the almighty power and she is female. Thus, unlike Napier Waller, Christian did not respond to literary narratives in a predominantly pictorial and sentimental manner but identified personally with them, and included private symbolism to highlight this connection.

Impressions of fellow students at the National Gallery Art School indicate that Christian Waller played an influential role in Napier Waller’s artistic development. Peter Perry, the former Director of the Castlemaine Art Gallery and Museum, in a letter to Nicholas Draffin, recalled dealings he had with a former School student who knew the Wallers. Perry recalled that:

> Mrs R. W. Sturgess (née Meta Townsend) who was at the [National] Gallery [Art] School with Christian has indicated that Christian, or ‘Chrissie’ as she was known... was the driving force behind Napier’s art work. Both were quiet workers...839

Although the above can be interpreted as hearsay, its importance is enhanced given the dearth of primary sources relating to the Wallers’ time at the School.

What is clear is that, from the time of their meeting, the Wallers began a dialogue in their art where they explored imaginative themes drawn from literature and mythology, which had been advanced by the Arts and Crafts Movement and Pre-Raphaelitism. They also responded to the Movement’s emphasis on the integrity of the handmade work of art and the importance of the natural world. This dialogue—

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838 The pen and ink illustration was featured in *Art and Letters: Hassell’s Australian Miscellany* (1922), but may have been executed a few years before its publication. The illustration accompanied a poem of the same name by Alice Reeves. See: Vidler, *Art and Letters: Hassell’s Australian Miscellany*, p. 21.

in the 1910s and 1920s—was expressed in graphic art and printmaking. For each, their art engaged with myths and symbols, rather than responding directly to the imagery of modern life.840

These works were executed individually and are marked by each artist’s distinct aesthetic, yet parallel mythological themes were explored on occasion. For example, Napier explored his interest in Morris through narratives that, despite their mythological themes, show the figure connected with its physical environment, in works such as the wood-engraving *The Ring* 1923 [Figure 170]. In this print Waller responded to Morris’ interpretation of the Norse god Sigurd, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblings* (1876), by depicting the physical strength of the figure. Although dressed in a manner that clearly removes him from the present day, Sigurd appears grounded within the image and looks out to the viewer. Christian Waller, by contrast, explored mystical themes as in her watercolour *Tristan and Isolde* (c. 1922) that reveals her understanding of Classical and medieval art, expressed in her treatment of the figures and their clothing. It is a subtler, more mystical engagement with myth than her husband’s bold print *The Ring*.

A common theme in these works is an idealised vision of the world that is removed from the pressures of modern life. Their personal vision of arcadia was, however, markedly different. For Christian Waller there was a constant sense of moving beyond the picture plane, towards a higher plane of existence. Napier Waller’s arcadia, by contrast, lay within the physical world, and celebrated the vitality and progress of humankind. Despite these differences the couple—especially Christian Waller—held the view that art must have a didactic function which combined the integrity of design and materials with an uplifting message. They shared an objective to produce uplifting artworks, inspired by a quasi-Socialist idealism which, as discussed, had direct links to the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain. This concern

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840 There are passing references to the fashions and industries of the 1920s and 1930s, but these are minor parts of a symbolic whole, usually in commissioned works such as the Newspaper House mosaic and Christian Waller’s fashion illustrations.
with producing art for the ‘common good’, rather than for their own enjoyment, has a natural affinity with monumental art due to its location in public spaces. Indeed, it was in the 1920s when they turned their talents to producing monumental art that the parallels in their practice intensified. This was facilitated by the home and studios they designed.

**Fairy Hills: The Wallers’ Arts and Crafts Domestic Vision**

The first major collaborative project the Wallers undertook was their home at Fairy Hills, Ivanhoe, Victoria. In 1922, the couple moved into their Arts and Crafts home by the Darebin Creek on what was previously the Fairy Hills estate. They drew inspiration from English Arts and Crafts houses, the Celtic Revival, and Pre-Raphaelitism in the design of the home and its interiors in order to create a living and working environment that espoused their aesthetic values.

![Unknown photographer, The Boulevard at Fairy Hills, 1920, gelatin silver photograph, Heidelberg Historical Society, Heidelberg](image)

In 1920, Napier Waller purchased Lot 34 of the Fairy Hills Estate, which had been settled as farmland in the nineteenth century. Fairy Hills offered a semi-rural lifestyle—with just one-hundred-and-thirty-eight houses by 1922—at a short distance from central Melbourne (which was accessible by both road and train) [Figure 171].¹⁴¹ Their friend Norman Macgeorge had purchased Lot 26 during a subdivision of the estate in 1910.¹⁴² In an undated exercise book, Macgeorge’s wife May Macgeorge wrote that her husband “had always wanted to live by the river and had

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the good fortune to find several blocks of land still unsold on the old Fairy Hills estate". Macgeorge engaged leading Arts and Crafts architect Harold Desbrowe-Annear (1865–1933) to design a house, named Ballangeich, on the land.

Debate regarding Desbrowe-Annear’s possible involvement with the Waller House has overshadowed the Wallers’ central role in its conception and design. He has been credited as having assisted Napier Waller with the design. He and Napier Waller (probably Christian Waller too) were friends. In 1926, Napier Waller designed a bookplate for him [Figure 172], and the architect proudly placed impressions of it in his prized rare book collection. Given that Waller only designed bookplates for close friends, and the fact that he produced this bookplate indicates a friendship between Desbrowe-Annear and himself. Nonetheless, I have not found any primary evidence to support the idea that Desbrowe-Annear played a role in the design of the Waller House.

I argue that Desbrowe-Annear’s influence on the Wallers and their house was ideological rather than practical. He was a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts movement in Melbourne, and shared many artistic philosophies with the Wallers. As Edquist has shown, he was firmly committed to the movement’s emphasis on ‘truth to materials’, although he was realistic about the practical need to utilise some machine-made materials in his architectural work. He advocated the Arts and Crafts philosophy and applied this to his own architectural commissions, which included designs for artists’ houses. A house like the Wallers’ home at Fairy Hills, therefore,
had many synergies with the homes of a similar scale Desbrowe-Annear designed but there is no evidence that it was actually designed by him. Charles Trinick, brother of John Trinick, assisted in the construction of the house, which was executed by the builder Phillip Millsom.\footnote{Smith, “Creative Relationships within the Australian House Museum,” p. 57.}

However, when mentioned in scholarship, the Waller House is frequently attributed to Desbrowe-Annear and Napier Waller; Christian Waller is not cited as having contributed to its design. This is a reflection of the gendered nature of architectural discourse, which marginalises the contributions of women.\footnote{A useful discussion of this issue can be found in the following article: Elizabeth Birmingham, “The Case of Marion Mahony Griffin and the Gendered Nature of Discourse in Architectural History,” Women’s Studies 35, no. 2 (2006): pp. 87–123.} Indeed, she has been marginalised from the history of the house, as reflected on the official plaque at the entrance [Figure 173]. It is logical to assume that she contributed to the design of the house with her husband, perhaps under the guidance of Desbrowe-Annear or another, unknown third party, given that she was so involved in every other aspect of the house’s development. In 1934, for example, she was responsible for decorating the Blue Room that was created by an extension into the verandah, which was overseen by leading modernist architect Percy Meldrum (1887–1968).\footnote{Terence Lane, “The Napier Waller House, Fairy Hills,” Heidelberg Historian, no. 192 (June 1999): p. 2.}
A photograph of the Wallers [Figure 174] on what could be their block of land at Fairy Hills indicates they worked together to create a home that reflected their shared vision. It shows the couple standing facing each other in front of a bush on a block of land while Christian Waller affectionately passes her husband a piece of fruit as though recreating the Christian story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; other buildings are discernible in the distance. Underneath the image Waller has written “On Our Selection”, a reference to a popular book 1899 of the same name by Steele Rudd (pseudonym of Arthur Hoey Davis, 1868–1935). The book chronicled the development of a farm on a vacant block of land; in 1920 a popular film adaptation was released.\(^{853}\) This photograph, which she affixed to the inside of a brown card that, on the cover, is addressed “with best wishes to J. B. Trinick” is a proud statement of the couple at the point when they were about to build their home and wished to share the happy occasion with their close friend, whose brother was helping them to realise their domestic vision.

![Image of the Waller House](image)

The design and decorative embellishment of the Waller House drew on mainly Arts and Crafts and Pre-Raphaelite influences. The hand of both Christian and Napier Waller is felt in the design elements, which were also inspired by Medievalism and the uplifting potential of quality items of decorative art. In 1925, Napier Waller expressed his reverence for the house in a colour linocut print, *The House on the Hill* [Figure 175], which depicts the house set within its natural environment. No other buildings can be seen in this idyllic image of a house that is separated from modern, urban life. The perspective makes the house appear larger than it is, symbolising its significance for the artist.

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The Wallers’ decision to live at a distance from the city was not uncommon for artists living in Melbourne in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The disillusionment with urban living and embrace of semi-rural living inspired the Garden City Movement, which emerged in Britain at the close of the nineteenth century. For Christian Waller, the distance from the city facilitated her retreat into her inner world. Unlike Napier Waller—whose appointment as Senior Art Teacher in the School of Applied Art at the Working Men’s College (now Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) in 1932 took him regularly to the city—Christian Waller spent most of her time at Fairy Hills.

The Waller House [Figures 176] is one of the most intriguing artist houses in Australia. Through the designs for the house and its interior, the couple created an environment that espoused their aesthetic and romantic ideals; it had a minstrel’s gallery, hand-combed walls in the living room [Figure 177], furniture painted with scenes from Arthurian legends, and an art studio (two additional studios were added in the 1930s).

As art historian Terence Lane has suggested, the inclusion of furnishing inspired by medieval design within the Waller House recalls William Morris’ Red House in England, which was designed by the architect Philip Webb (1831–1915) in 1859.854 For the Red House Morris collaborated with Webb on the design of the house and also oversaw the interior design, which featured custom-made furniture embellished

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with Arthurian narratives and medieval-style ornament. The location of the Red House also provided reprieve from the bustling metropolis, yet was within a commutable distance.

Given the Wallers’ admiration for Morris and Pre-Raphaelitism, their house at Fairy Hills indicates a desire to embrace Arts and Crafts values in their personal life, as well as in their art. For Christian Waller, the social potential aligned with her desire to communicate her spiritual values, including visitors to her home. Pate recalled many visitors coming to the Waller House with young people being particularly drawn to her aunt. Waller would tell stories from her travels in Ireland in an environment that reinforced Celtic connections and mystical ideas.

Waller designed and painted furniture for the Waller House, including a hall stand, a further indication of her central involvement in the design of the house and its interior. I have located a hall stand [Figure 178] painted by Christian Waller that was originally in the Waller House. It still contains a sketch [Figure 179] for it, which clearly indicates her role in designing as well as decorating the piece. Waller sketched two versions of the hall stand: one with an oval-shaped panel (presumably for a painted embellishment) at the top, with circles signifying the placement of three hooks below this oval panel; and another design—which is closer to the final version—features a larger rectangular panel, with three hooks indicated at the top on

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855 Morris sought the assistance of his family and close friends, including Edward Burne-Jones and his wife Georgiana. Imogen Hart, Arts and Crafts Objects (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 67–68.
856 The Red House is located in Bexleyheath, Kent, twelve kilometres from London.
857 Pate, “Klytie Pate Interviewed by James Murdoch.”
the panel. The final hallstand includes the rectangular feature panel, and an oval-shaped mirror has been placed in the middle, with the painted scene created sympathetically around the mirror, which becomes a window in the scene. The coat hooks sit to the left and right of the image, and a third is located bottom centre of the panel.

Waller included the Celtic mythic figures Tristram and la Belle Iséult in the painted panel.\footnote{No doubt aware of her interest in Celtic myths and legends, publisher Edward A. Vidler gifted Waller a 1910 edition of \textit{The Romance of Tristram and Iséult}, inscribing the book to "Christian Yandell Waller from Edward A. Vidler". La Scala, "Inventory—Napier Waller Library—9 Crown Road Ivanhoe," p. 17.\footnote{Ayto, \textit{Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable}, s. v. "Tristram, Sir," p. 1412.\footnote{In the watercolour, Iséult wears an empire-waisted dress that is very similar to one by the female figure in Napier Waller's 1928 mural at the T & G Building in Melbourne, indicating that it may have served as inspiration for the design of the dress in the mural, or that Christian Waller collaborated with her husband on the design, as she did on the mural scheme for the Myer Mural Hall (1935), which is discussed later in this chapter.}
\footnote{In \textit{The Art of Christian Waller} exhibition \textit{Morgan Le Fay}, one of these panels—which had been removed from its chair—was exhibited. Its current whereabouts and that of the other panels is not known. The panels were removed after Waller's death and distributed amongst her family members. Thomas, \textit{The Art of Christian Waller}, p. 64; Terence Lane, "Terence Lane Interviewed by Grace Blakeley- Carroll." Carlton, VIC. 11 April 2014.}} This was one of her favoured themes also depicted in a watercolour about the same time, which was probably a feature panel in the house at Fairy Hills [Figure 180]. The Celtic story of the lovers doomed by virtue of their consumption of a magical potion was incorporated into Arthurian myths and inspired poetry and art in the Victorian era.\footnote{In her interpretation of the story, she emphasised the intense emotional connection between the two doomed lovers as, despite being separated, their eyes are transfixed on one another. They stand in profile on either side of the oval mirror wearing flowing medieval garments.\footnote{In addition to the hallstand, Christian Waller painted—and presumably designed—a set of dining-room chairs, each of which featured a figure from the Knights of the Round Table on the backrest. Only one piece of painted furniture remains in the Waller House. A settee located in the living room [Figure 181], features a painted panel across the back that depicts two medieval knights jousting on a horse. The painted panel is unsigned, and this, coupled with the fact it was not removed from the house after Christian Waller's death (as was the case with the majority of artworks she created), has led to its authorship being attributed to Napier Waller.}}

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The inclusion of painted furniture is another way in which the Wallers paid homage to the Arts and Crafts Movement when establishing their house. Painted furniture was a common component of Arts and Crafts interiors, which often featured bespoke designs. Such was the painted wardrobe [Figure 182] by Burne-Jones, depicting Geoffrey Chaucer’s (c. 1343–1400), “Prioress Tale” from *The Canterbury Tales* (1478) gifted to William Morris as a wedding present, which was first situated in the Red House and later displayed in the drawing room at Kelmscott House.  

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A design I have located in the Waller House reveals that the couple were concerned with the garden surrounding their home, as well as with the design of the house and its interiors. In a drawer in the living room at the Waller House, I found a sketch for a garden bed [Figure 183] by Napier Waller. The design was executed in pencil and watercolour and depicts a garden bed alongside a path. In the bottom left-hand corner there are notes indicating the volume and variety of plants that will be planted in the garden bed: half-a-dozen “Goliath” orange; eight dozen daisies, lobelia; six dozen red and six dozen mixed petunia; three dozen daffodils and four feet of Deutzia. Within the garden bed itself Waller made annotations alongside drawings of plants, indicating their names. These include: apricots, nec [nectarines], iris, passion [passionflower], ger [gerberas] and hyd [hydrangeas].

The sketch shows that Napier Waller took the effort to carefully plan what they would plant and where each plant would be placed. It also shows that Napier Waller had a sound understanding of plant varieties. However, the absence of native Australian plants is notable: the choice of plants has more in common with an English cottage garden. This reinforces my argument that the Wallers’ engagement with the values of the Arts and Crafts Movement was modelled more on British manifestations of the Movement. For, were he to embrace the value of ‘truth to nature’, he would have selected native Australian plants for inclusion in the garden bed, as landscape gardener Edna Walling (1895–1973) promoted from the 1920s.863

This evidence, combined with Christian Waller’s design for the hallstand, indicates

that the Wallers worked together on different elements of the design for their house at Fairy Hills, including its interior furnishing and the surrounding gardens. Having created a domestic and working environment that expressed their interests and values, the Wallers then began working together on monumental projects.

**Traces of Collaboration on Monumental Commissions**

The Wallers collaborated on several monumental projects in the media of stained glass, mosaics and mural painting, chiefly between 1927 and 1935 but these works have until now been formally attributed to Napier Waller. I have identified several major projects that were almost certainly produced in collaboration, and a number of others where the authorship is harder to identify, but do indicate a degree of collaboration. In this section I analyse three major collaborative projects in the media of mosaic, mural painting and stained glass respectively: *Five Lamps of Learning* (1931), *Myer Mural Hall* (1933–35) and *The Leckie Window* (1935). In my discussion of these collaborative projects emphasis is on the as yet formally uncredited role Christian Waller had in their conception and realisation.

The Wallers began collaborating on monumental artworks in the late 1920s. Although influencing one another since they met, it was not until monumental art became their focus that they formally collaborated. In 1926, as mentioned in Chapter Five, the Wallers began working with eminent stained-glass artist William Montgomery, who taught them the rudiments of stained glass. Towards the end of his life the Wallers assisted with the completion of cartoons and stained-glass windows. Christian Waller completed designs for windows.865

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864 The majority of these are stained-glass windows. While there is not scope to discuss each work in this thesis, I have indicated instances of potential collaboration in Appendix D.

Given they studied and lived together, and also shared the same working spaces in their Ivanhoe home, it is natural that there are parallels between their artworks. In the *Travel Sketchbook* evidence suggests the Wallers used the same book to make notes about their travels and stained-glass tuition. However, the sketchbook is predominately filled with notes and sketches by Christian Waller, who wrote her name and London address on the inner cover, as well as the words “humility, prayer, merry heart, service, moral courage” signalling her ownership of it. It contains two pages of notes and drawings by Napier Waller concerning the process of making stained glass, and includes detailed references to pigments and chemical properties of glass and silver stain. On one page the Wallers have each made notes about stained glass [Figure 184]. What this demonstrates is that the couple did not produce their art in isolation from each other, but they shared the same spaces.

**Collaboration in Mosaic, Including the *Five Lamps of Learning***

Evidence indicates that the Wallers also collaborated on monumental mosaic commissions, including the mosaic the *Five Lamps of Learning* (1931) [Figure 185], yet Christian Waller’s contribution has not been formally recognised. Press accounts from the 1930s that refer to Napier Waller’s monumental commission include mention of a lunette mosaic for above the south window of Winthrop Hall, the

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Hackett Memorial Building on the recommendation of the building’s architect, Rodney H. Alsop (1881–1932). The original brief was to produce a mosaic that responded to the University’s motto ‘seek wisdom’. Waller drew on a Biblical passage from The Book of Isaiah xi 2:

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.867

As Waller explained in a 1959 letter to J. R. Jones of the Classics and Ancient History Department at the University of Western Australia, he drew inspiration for the five Wisdom Virtues in the mosaic from the passage from the Book of Isaiah, and selected five of the seven gifts of the holy spirit mentioned in the Book: Fortitudo, Consilium, Sapientia, Intellectus, and Scientia.868

Christian Waller’s role in the design and execution of the Five Lamps of Learning mosaic is sustained by primary evidence. Alsop recounted a visit to the Wallers’ studio at Fairy Hills in an interview with the West Australian newspaper. The unnamed reporter wrote that Alsop had:

Inspected the mosaic panel for the archway over the Senate room window, which was now being executed in Melbourne by Mr and Mrs Napier Waller. Half of it had been completed, and the rate of progress of the work, about a square foot per day, indicated the care and minuteness with which the artists

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868 He excluded two of the virtues: Pietas (piety) and Timor Domini (fear). He explained that “the design is really a representation of the parable, with each lighted lamp being one of the expressions of complete wisdom, as read on the soffits of the window below… the smaller background figures are the ‘unilluminated’, the unwise virgins of the parable”.
See: Napier Waller to J. R. Jones, 1 April 1959. Ibid.; Mervyn Napier Waller to Sir John Macfarland, 3 August 1934. File. Ian Potter Museum of Art, Carlton, VIC.
were treating the panel.\textsuperscript{869}

That the reporter refers to both the Wallers—not just Napier, who was commissioned to complete the mosaic on Alsop’s recommendation—indicates the couple collaborated on the project, yet it was Napier Waller who received formal credit for the work.\textsuperscript{870} It is likely, therefore, that Christian Waller collaborated with Napier Waller on both the design and execution of the \textit{Five Lamps of Learning}.

Given the mosaic was commissioned just one month after the Wallers’ return to Australia in March 1930 buoyed by their travels and their shared vision that public art could be inspirational, it is understandable they worked together on the project. Waller’s study of the art of mosaic was discussed later in the previously-mentioned article, “Cathedral Windows” published in the \textit{Argus} in March 1930, after her travels took her to the Italian city of Ravenna to see Byzantine mosaics in the Basilica of San Vitale (526–27). The article also referred to the Wallers’ travel to the Venetian island of Torcello to see how mosaics were made. The reporter wrote that “Mrs. Waller has also much that is interesting to tell of mosaic in glass, which she and her husband also hope to execute out here [in Australia]”.\textsuperscript{871} The tone and content of the article reveal Wallers’ objective to collaborate at the point of their return to Australia.

Christian Waller completed two designs for mosaics that are further evidence of her interest in the medium. These designs were not executed and the circumstances surrounding their execution are not known. A sketch [Figure 186] shows early version of the two designs which show Christ as the Good Shepherd. A later study of the first design [Figure 187] shows Christ seated instead of standing. The colour design of the second sketch [Figure 188] is more polished, and includes gold paint in the background and on the hem of Christ’s outer robe. It has a mystical feeling reinforced by the inclusion of stylised flowers at Christ’s feet, the shaft of sunlight and dove above his head and vibrant rainbow behind him. The gold paint an awareness of Byzantine mosaics, which included gold leaf in tessera. This includes those she likely saw in Ravenna, Italy, when she and her husband visited during their overseas travels. The stunning apse mosaics make heavy use of gold and coloured

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{870} Alsop referred to his recommendation of Napier Waller in the following letter: Rodney Alsop to Professor Whitfield, 23 April 1930. Hackett Buildings. Papers 1927–85.
\textsuperscript{871} “Cathedral Windows,” p. 28.
\end{footnotesize}
tesserae, and are considered the finest mosaics of the Early-Byzantine period.872 The fact she travelled to Ravenna indicates her interest in mosaics and desire to understand the medium in order to produce work in Australia.

The design of the *Five Lamps of Learning* indicates Christian Waller’s contribution. In particular, the symbolic use of floral and other forms of natural imagery is closely

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aligned with her *œuvre* and the way in which she sought to express her sense of the spiritual through her art. Indeed, Draffin has drawn attention to the resonances between the design for the *Five Lamps of Learning* and the art she produced in the early 1930s, and concluded the design suggests “some influence from Christian”. He highlighted the geometric, zigzag pattern employed to represent flowing water in the background of the mosaic, as well as the depictions of irises and lotus flowers at the very base of the image, above the capital of each column. As identified in Chapter Four, these symbols are prominent in *The Great Breath* in which they also served to communicate her spiritual values. Draffin’s observations—particularly given his familiarity with Napier Waller’s art practice developed through curating an exhibition and writing a monograph on his work—further indicate his wife’s involvement in the conception of the narrative.

Analysis of the mosaic makes clear that Christian Waller’s technical proficiency imparted a mystical character to the figurative scenes that was absent from Napier Waller’s *œuvre* in the 1930s and from other examples of his painted mosaics not produced in collaboration with his wife, such as the mosaics in the Hall of Memory, the Australian War Memorial, Canberra (1952–58). This is seen through the rendering of the five virtues (or women) in the centre of the design. They are depicted front on and are wearing Classical costumes. Behind the figure closest to the right hand side of the image is the image of a man, who is dressed in similar attire to the virtues. The man is shown giving something to a beggar or worshipper at his feet.

874 Ibid.
The mosaic has parallels with the costume design in Christian Waller’s art of this time, including *The Gates of Dawn*. This includes the motif of a flower being passed on [Figure 189]. Further, the inclusion of Greek ornament on the robes is similar to the pattern Christian Waller incorporated in the design for *The Lords of Venus* from *The Great Breath* (1932). It is clear, then, that the design elements of the mosaic have strong parallels with design elements of Christian Waller’s art in the early 1930s. This includes that of the *Robe of Glory* [Figure 190] mural, commissioned by the Fawkner Crematorium in 1937, which also features redolent blues and rich russet red, as well as zigzag patterning to indicate water.\(^875\) These design elements are not seen in artworks made independently by Napier Waller.

In addition to the *Five Lamps of Learning*, evidence suggests that Christian Waller also contributed to the “*I’ll put a girdle round about the earth*”: *Newspaper House Mosaic* (1933) [Figures 191–92], a further indication of the extent to which she and her husband

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\(^875\) This mural is analysed in detail in Chapter Seven.
collaborated on monumental artworks. The mosaic was commissioned by newspaper proprietor Theodore Fink (1855–1942) for the façade of Newspaper House in Collins Street, Melbourne. It may have come about at the suggestion of the Wallers’ friend, architect Donald Turner, who worked alongside Meldrum at the firm Stephenson and Meldrum Architects (later Stephenson and Turner); Turner and his family lived at the Waller House while the couple was overseas in 1929–30.

While the composition is predominately the work of Napier Waller, some symbols and design elements strongly indicate his wife’s input. Her role is affirmed by comments she made in a postcard to her friend John Tallis in February 1933, where she observed: “Mervyn [Napier Waller] is doing an enormous mosaic for the front of the new Herald building in Collins Street. I have left my second book [The Gates of Dawn] to help him”. While she did not specify the nature of the help, given this postcard was written around the time Napier Waller received the commission, it likely included assisting with the conception and design of the mosaic and that her role was so significant that it required her to abandon her bookmaking.

Visual analysis of the mosaic affirms this. Draffin acknowledged the “temptation to see astrological and other arcane symbolism as inspired by Christian” in this mosaic. When the work is contextualised within her broader œuvre, I argue, it becomes clear that she did make important contributions to it. This is apparent in the section in the upper right of the mosaic that shows the heads of four figures—three men and a woman—in profile, surrounded by astrological planetary symbols: Uranus, Jupiter, Mercury and Venus. This has strong parallels with the design The Lords of Venus from The Great Breath. The strongest sign of her involvement is, however, the blazing sun that unifies the narrative as is placed in the centre of the images, possessing a halo-like presence behind the central figure’s head. The sun was Waller’s most important symbol that she used to represent God, and as was the case in the frontispiece for The Gates of Dawn, here she has drawn inspiration from Harry Clarke’s previously-discussed illustration Ligeia [Figure 74], to devise a striking solar

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876 The title was selected by Fink and is a quotation from William Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1595–1597, act II, scene I, lines 160–61). Draffin, The Art of M. Napier Waller, p. 9.
877 Christian Waller designed bookplates for Fink and his daughter, arts patron Hilda Elliott, around this time.
878 Turner’s daughter, architect Gene Willsford née Turner, was about eight or nine years old at the time. She recalls that her family maintained a friendship with the Wallers and that they visited them while they were working on the Newspaper House mosaic. Gene Willsford, “Gene Willsford Interviewed by Grace Blakeley-Carroll.” Canberra, 2 August 2014.
879 Waller, “Postcard to John Tallis [with image of Ola Cohn working on the Fairies’ Tree on the front].”
depiction that in this instance is used as a symbol for the enlightenment that newspapers—through sharing knowledge and ideas—can provide.

Collaboration in Stained Glass, Including *The Leckie Window*

Mastering the art of stained glass was a venture the Wallers undertook collaboratively. I argue that the couple sought to become proficient in the medium so they could work together on the conception, design and execution of ecclesiastical stained-glass windows. This motivation was expressed in an interview Christian Waller had with an unnamed reporter from the *Argus* newspaper less than two weeks after she returned to Australia in 1930. The unnamed reporter summarised the interview as follows:

In future she [Waller] will work with her husband in their studio at Ivanhoe, where, following the example of artists overseas, they will combine the art and the craft of stained glass, completing the whole work themselves.\(^{881}\)

This statement offers insight into why the Wallers travelled all the way to England to study stained glass. The “example of artists overseas” no doubt refers to the ‘Whall School’ and the reference to their studio shows that the couple worked side-by-side.

The couple’s shared understanding of the importance of creating public art to uplift and inspire the spirit came full circle with their design and execution of *The Leckie Window* in 1935 [Figure 193]. Close analysis of the lights (or panels) in the window makes clear that Christian Waller’s distinctive design sensibilities—geometric forms, figures moving towards the heavens and heads in profile—and use of her personal set of symbols imparted a mystical atmosphere to the window scenes that is not seen in Napier Waller’s stained glass of this period. Her contribution is particularly visible in the symbolism in the three lights that form the left-hand side of the window. Indeed, the design suggests that she played a key role in designing the left-hand lights whereas

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881 “Cathedral Windows,” p. 28.
Napier Waller focused on the right-hand side, which was symbolic of the predominately feminine masculine symbols on the left and right respectively. However, they included personal symbols in lights the other designed, making this a truly collaborative work.

*The Leckie Window* consists of six lights assembled in two long vertical columns of three lights each, with tracery at the top. At the top is the female *Moon* on the left and the *Sun* on the right. The Moon, potentially the Goddess Artemis, is shown with a crescent moon forming a halo behind her head, a frequent symbol in Waller’s art, seen in her prints such as *[Ex Libris for] Hilda Elliott*, (c. 1932) [Figure 194]. The Moon holds a stylised lotus in her right hand and a flaming chalice in her left. The male *Sun’s* (Artemis) twin brother Apollo, is depicted with flame-like hair that is characteristic of her treatment of male figures during the 1930s, as seen in the designs for *The Great Breath*.

The central left-hand light also shows Christian Waller’s influence on the design of *The Leckie Window*. It depicts *Ceres*, the goddess of the earth, incorporating an expressive use of hair. Ceres is shown in profile floating down to earth, emphasised by her long blond hair that flanks her body and her downward gaze. Draffin singled out this and *Prometheus*, the central light on the right, as particularly suggestive of Christian Waller’s contribution in his monograph on Napier Waller.882 Indeed *Prometheus* has an upward thrust that also shows the influence of Christian Waller; though the solid, angular nature of the figure is in keeping with Napier Waller’s art. As Caroline Miley has noted, Christian Waller favoured the single figure in her windows, and frequently depicted them floating upwards.883 Napier Waller, by contrast, depicted his figures attached to the ground with solidity and strength. He drew particularly on painting techniques from the Italian Renaissance during the mid-1930s, and showed his figures as having somewhat of a two-dimensional quality.884

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882 The Art of M. Napier Waller, pp. 9, 68.
883 Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” p. 46.
884 See: Margaret Riddle, ed. Renaissance References in Australian Art, University Gallery, the University of Melbourne, 14 August–20 September 1985 (Melbourne: Department of Fine Arts, The University of Melbourne, 1985), unpaginated.
While their attire and expression imbue an otherworldly quality to his figure, they remain connected to the setting they are depicted in. The sense of movement in *Prometheus* is also achieved primarily through the expressive depiction of hair—in this case long fiery red hair—which is also a sign of Christian Waller’s influence.

The bottom lights continue the predominance of Christian Waller’s aesthetic on the left and her husband’s on the right. The hidden face in the upper left of the light, something also seen in the upper centre of the *Ceres* window signals Christian Waller’s influence. This motif is, I argue, a representation of God and can also be seen in her *Revelation Window* (1948) [Figure 195] at Christ Church, Geelong, Victoria.

Napier Waller’s influence is again seen in the *Phidias* light at the bottom right. The depiction of the famous Classical sculptor at work has parallels with the treatment of the male figure carrying out manual tasks seen in the design for the BHP Mural [Figure 196] at Australia House, London produced in the early 1930s.

The angular forms of the six lights in the *Leckie Window* have strong parallels with the graphic art of Christian Waller. The vertical thrust of the pieces of glass reinforces the idea of the figures moving upward. The compositional device is most effective in the *Ceres* and *Promethaus* panels. In each light, the human form is surrounded by
vertical pieces of light-coloured glass. It is as though these represent the mystical aura around the figures. In this way, the design references the use of line and treatment of figures seen in *The Great Breath*.

This use of vertical lines to convey a mystical atmosphere is also powerfully expressed in Christian Waller’s *Nativity* window—also made in 1935—[Figure 197] at the Uniting Church (formerly Methodist), Balwyn Road, Canterbury, Victoria. The long, perpendicular window depicts the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child. Above her floats the Holy Spirit clasping the chalice. Mary’s head is shown in profile, whereas the Christ child looks toward the viewer, his arms outstretched. Pink glass above her head connects her to the Holy Father. Mary’s flowing blue robes add a sense of movement to the image and suggest she too is floating above ground level. Pink glass is also used in the garments worn by the Holy Father. These garments morph into a mandorla around his head and upper body. Orange and red glass is included in bands on either side of his head, suggesting the rays of the sun.

Christian Waller completes the sense of moving upwards by creating a subtle point in the Holy Father’s hair. The top of this point connects with a dove, symbolic of the Holy Spirit.

Extant correspondence reveals that Napier Waller was approached to undertake *The Leckie Window* commission in mid-1934. In a letter to Sir John MacFarland, Chancellor of Melbourne University, dated August 3rd that year, Waller agreed to complete the windows in his Fairy Hills studio for the fee of £500. Waller went on to indicate that he would not be finished with his current projects until October, but after then he “would devote [himself],

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885 Waller to Macfarland, 3 August 1934.
with necessary studio assistance to this work". Waller’s description of studio assistance as “necessary” confirms that he was unable to complete his windows independently. This was partly due to the laborious, large-scale of stained glass work, a medium that has a history of collaboration dating back to its inception in the Middle Ages. Another factor was Waller’s disability that would have made assistance an even greater requirement, for he could not use a prosthetic arm and would have been unable to carry out all the tasks associated with monumental art commission without assistance.

One of the projects Napier Waller was working on in 1934 was the Pioneers Window [Figure 198], a large four-light window for the Wesley Church on La Trobe Street, in central Melbourne, that was completed the following year. In a letter to his wife, Mabel, the composer Fritz Hart recalled speaking with the Wallers about the window:

> Last night Mervyn [Napier] and Christian [Waller] again came for supper. We had a good talk about stained glass and such things. Mervyn has a new, and glorious, window in Wesley Church [Melbourne].

The Pioneers Window celebrates the centenary of Wesley Church in Victoria in 1935, and depicts the biblical figures Abraham, Isaiah, Amos and Jonas. The figures have been executed with pale colours of glass, contrasted with bright garments on their torso and over their shoulders. The colour palette graduates to darker green, blue and aquamarine glass at the top of the figures and in the tracery, in a manner similar to the Revelation Window. The angular treatment of the forms was characteristic of both the Wallers’ stained glass in this period, yet the subjects are grounded, not moving upwards, they have detailed, realistic facial features as opposed to the suggestive, mystical rendering of faces carried out by Christian Waller.

Christian Waller was undoubtedly one of the ‘assistants’ on the Leckie Window project and, no doubt, on most of Napier Waller’s major works before their 1937 rift. The term ‘assistant’, however, does not give justice to her role; ‘collaborator’ is a more appropriate term. Indeed, historian David Dolan, who researched Napier Waller’s stained glass in South Australia, is one of several scholars who referred to the Wallers producing stained glass in collaboration, yet this has not changed the fact that the

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886 Ibid.
artworks in question are yet to be reattributed as collaborative works. During his research Dolan interviewed the Dean who facilitated Napier Waller’s stained glass commission *Nativity (Memorial to Charlotte Elizabeth Wall)* (1938) for St Bartholomew’s Norwood, Adelaide, and made the following observation:

Over the years, Dean Berry noticed that Waller’s wife undertook an increasing share of the stained-glass work, as his interest shifted more towards mosaics.888 The use of the term ‘share’ in this context suggests the Wallers routinely worked in collaboration on stained glass commissions and that the churches that commissioned their work knew this.889

In his insightful essay on the Wallers’ collaborative relationship Draffin suggested Christian Waller played a role in the design of the *Leckie Window*. He rightly observed the presence of imagery seen elsewhere in Christian Waller’s—but not Napier Waller’s—œuvre. This includes the representation of the woman in the Sun window, which he identifies as having strong stylistic parallels with Christian Waller’s art. These design elements led Draffin to conclude that the work “suggests close collaboration” between the Wallers.890 Again, this view has not altered formal attribution of the work, perhaps due to the brevity of his essay. He was more direct with his views in a letter to an employee at the Melbourne University Art Gallery (now Ian Potter Museum of Art), where he stated: “It [the *Leckie Window*] is one of Christian Waller’s collaborative masterpieces, and deserves better attention.”891 Despite the evidence, Christian Waller is not yet acknowledged as a collaborator on the work and no mention of her is made in either the wall label or in catalogue records.892

Correct identification of this and other stained-glass commissions as collaborative works is only possible through analysis of the works the Wallers completed independently. The imagery of stained glass Napier Waller produced during this period—up until 1939—has strong parallels with that seen in Christian Waller’s

889 The Dean’s friendship with the Wallers is reinforced by the fact his wife was the sister of Ruth Stonier, for whom Christian Waller produced a bookplate in 1932 (fig. 6.19). Newspaper reports state Mrs Berry was staying with Stonier during the time when the bookplate was designed, and was likely acquainted with Waller as the latter only made bookplates for friends.
892 Ascertained by the author from research undertaken at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.
prints, illustrations and stained glass. After the Wallers experienced an emotional rift in 1937 and, when Christian Waller travelled to the USA two years later, these parallels diminished and Napier Waller’s stained glass produced from 1940 features more literal, earthly themes, executed with bolder, warmer colours than previously. This contrasts with the lyrical, symbolic narratives executed in a pastel palette of glass that characterise the stained glass he, I argue, produced in collaboration with Christian Waller in the late 1920s and in the 1930s.

The lack of recognition of Christian Waller’s contribution to *The Leckie Window* is compounded by instances of her work in stained glass being misattributed to her husband. I have identified another stained glass design which has also been misattributed: *Behold the Lamb of God and Behold I am the King, Sir John and Lady Mary Grice Memorial Windows* (c. 1939) [Figure 199]. Louis Williams arranged for Waller to design the windows in 1940, yet Napier Waller is listed as the creator of the cartoon. It features Christian Waller’s annotations relating to the measurement of the design and in its imagery and drawing techniques clearly points to it being her work. The angular treatment of the figures and their robes; the treatment of the facial features; the composition, with one large central figure and a vignette at the top, which features other figures, and the way the words have been written at the top and in the base of each light show this. The window was designed and later made for the Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd, Mount Macedon, Victoria, and were lost in the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires. A blurred interior shot of the church [Figure 200] that shows the window in the background, is the only known image of the completed work.
Correspondence in the Louis R. Williams papers confirms that Christian Waller completed the design. The project was delayed due to her overseas trip in 1939–40, which caused the donor to explore the possibility of Napier Waller designing the window instead. However, in a letter to Mrs Grice, Mr Waller reassured her that his wife would be returning to Australia and would then be in a position to complete the design and make the window. He offered to do the work but suggested she hold on for Christian Waller. Later letters between the donor and Williams establish that Waller did complete the windows. Despite this, the design remains formally attributed to Napier Waller and its catalogue record makes only a vague reference to Christian Waller’s contribution.

Draffin touched on this issue of preference towards attributing works from the Waller House to Napier Waller. Close examination of the preliminary sketches affirms the work of Christian Waller. This is translated into the completed work. Draffin’s view of the Wallers’ collaborative relationship was endorsed by others in

895 Correspondence between Louis Williams, Napier Waller, Christian Waller and Mrs Grice, located in: “Macedon File”, Records of Louis Reginald Williams, 1905–c. 1973, MS10990.
896 Ibid.
897 Ibid.
the Wallers’ circle. Correspondence between Draffin and Napier Waller’s sister Heather Waller reveals the family perspective on the Wallers’ relationship:

I would like to say how delighted I am that you gave Christian the publicity she richly deserved. She was a wonderful person—clever and a great inspiration to Mervyn in those early by gone [sic] years.\textsuperscript{898}

The comments above suggest the close and collaborative relationship the Wallers shared before their rift in 1937; although they did continue to work together, but not to the same extent. Collectively, sources such as this paint the picture of a marriage in which Christian and Napier Waller worked side-by-side, sharing studio spaces, ideas and, in some instances, the design and production of major commissions.

**Collaboration in Mural Painting: *Myer Mural Hall***

One collaboration that has received no discussion in extant scholarship on Christian Waller is the mural painting scheme known as the *Myer Mural Hall*. Although attributed solely to Napier Waller, I argue that Christian Waller played a key role in the conception and design of the murals. The sketches by her that I have located in several collections are preliminary designs for the murals. This monumental commission, I demonstrate, involved multiple instances of collaboration, as the murals were likely painted with the assistance of Napier Waller’s students from the Working Men’s College.

Nine murals were commissioned by businessman Sidney Myer (1878–1934) in 1933 to adorn a large function room on the sixth floor of the Myer Emporium on Bourke Street in central Melbourne.\textsuperscript{899} The large murals, which were installed in 1935, depict scenes and subjects from history, focussing on modern and ancient European history, and were executed in tempera. The murals are titled: *Women in Literature, Conveyances Down the Years, Sea Transport Down the Years, Beautiful Women in History, Of Sports Through the Ages, Women Famous in History, Drama Through the Ages, Spring and the Dance, Personalities from Opera and Revelation and Fashion*. These themes were probably selected by Myer, given the particular focus on certain areas—fashion, opera, sport, transportation and women—however this cannot be ascertained due to a dearth of

\textsuperscript{898} Heather Waller to Nicholas Draffin, 14 May 1979. Curatorial File: Napier Waller.
\textsuperscript{899} MacDonald, “Napier Waller,” p. 29.
primary evidence related to the commission. Technically, they were devised as layered compositions that feature multiple vignettes on each panel, and were painted in a manner that paid homage to Napier Waller’s interest in Renaissance art.

My analysis of the painted panels establishes that Christian Waller’s sketches form the basis of designs for a number of figures in the murals. In the *Travel Sketchbook*, there are pages of sketches for the mural. These are annotated with names and dates of the subjects which were written in Christian Waller’s handwriting. The sketch also is clearly her work, evidenced by the differences between her’s and Napier’s sketching style. Two sketches in the NGV, also by Christian, are evidence of her collaboration with Napier on the project. One of these, [Figure 201], can be matched directly to a section of the mural [Figure 202]. Furthermore, I have located a detailed page of notes and sketches in Christian Waller’s hand related to the *Myer Mural Hall* commission in her *Travel Sketchbook*.

Despite repeated references and the existence of evidence indicating Christian Waller’s role in the commission, no mention is made of her contribution in extant scholarship on either her or her husband’s art. She is also absent from press accounts relating to the commission published in the 1930s. Art critic Harold Herbert, writing in the *Australasian* in 1933, commented that: “In the new dining hall at the Myer Emporium one of a series of mural decorations by Mr M. Napier Waller has been
completed… the panel is called *Autumn: Women in Literature.*” Herbert goes on to comment on the costumes worn by the famous subjects, women from history:

the panel is a number of period vignettes embroidered together…the costume interest is incidental to the decoration, and is intended to make a note in a hall where winter fashion displays will be of feminine interest.900

Not only does Herbert fail to mention Christian Waller’s role in the design for the murals, he also dismisses the significance of one main area she contributed to: the costume designs. This account highlights the marginalisation of her input to major artworks that have been attributed solely to her husband.

![Figure 203: Napier Waller, Pastoral Pursuits of Australia (detail), 1927, oil on canvas, 160.0 x 430.0 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, James and Diana Ramsay Fund 1987](image)

The murals bear the contributions of both Christian and Napier Waller. The former’s lack of recognition has likely come about because the finished murals have a stronger affinity with the latter’s monumental art. As with his mural *The Pastoral Pursuits of Australia* (1927) [Figure 203], the corporeality of the figures in the Myer Murals is emphasised. This is seen in the panel *Spring* [Figure 204], in which the figures are dancing to the symphonic poem *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* by Claude Debussy (1862–1918). The rendering of the figures and the colour scheme reflects the influence of the Italian Renaissance on his practice at that time. Indeed, a similar influence is strongly felt in the eight murals in Café Florentino restaurant in Bourke Street, Melbourne, which were installed in 1935. The murals feature Italian themes, including stories from Dante and events from Florentine history, and employ similar stylisation and colour schemes.901 These panels are impersonal and pay homage to Waller’s reverence for the art and literature of the Italian Renaissance.

901 “Mural Decorations,” Australasian 1 September 1934, p. 16.
Napier Waller’s students assisted him with other monumental projects, a fact that reinforces my argument that it was not plausible that he completed large commissions independently. For example, in 1934 his students Anne Montgomery (daughter of William Montgomery), Jeane Diamond, Colvin Smith and Walter Beaumont completed four panels to his design for the Café Florentino commission.902 In a review in the Melbourne newspaper Australasian, Herbert implied that the murals were made by the students “under the direction and supervision of Waller”.903 The fact he invited his students to contribute to the project reveals two things: first, that he understood the necessity for assistance with large-scale projects and second, that he did not feel that the involvement of others diminished from his artistic integrity.

Having detailed key works in the media of mosaic, stained glass and mural painted that were produced collaboratively by the Wallers—yet until now have been attributed to Napier Waller—I will now contextualise their collaborative dynamic through analysis of the differences in their practices.

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902 Ibid.
903 “Art: Athenaeum Gallery,” p. 17.
Distinguishing Characteristics in the Art of Christian and Napier Waller

Despite the synergies in their œuvres, close analysis of the Wallers’ art—aided by principles of Connoisseurship—reveals distinct aesthetics in their use of symbols and their drawing techniques. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, although they responded to myths and legends and believed in the power of public art to uplift and inspire, they did so in markedly different ways. Napier Waller’s art highlights the physical strength of his subjects, whereas Christian Waller’s art is characterised by its symbolic, spiritual expression.

Napier Waller’s mural *The Pastoral Pursuits of Australia* (1927), commissioned for the grand dining room of the Menzies Hotel in Melbourne, is characteristic of his monumental art.904 The narrative emphasises the vitality of Australia through the physical strength of its citizens. As art historian Deborah Edwards has observed, Waller creates an Arcadia within the Australian landscape by combining Classical depictions of the human form with references to the Australian landscape.905 The figures are at one with the natural environment, an environment augmented by mock Classical ruins. Unlike Christian Waller’s art, there is no sense of the figures moving to another plane of existence, rather they appear contently integrated with the pleasure and the toil of their Arcadia in the Southern Hemisphere. Even the workers in the panels, such as the group of physically fit men to the left, appear happy to contribute to the ‘pastoral pursuit’ of their nation. Given the timing of the murals—executed in the inter-war period, leading up to the Great Depression—and Napier Waller’s own experiences in combat in the First World War, the murals can be viewed as a ‘call to order’, encouraging all Australians to work together for the common, secular, good. Draffin has insightfully described this as a humanistic orientation, developed from a wide variety of sources; including secular and temporal.906

Throughout Christian Waller’s œuvre, by contrast, there is a sense of the subjects not simply being of another time, but of moving towards an alternative—more

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904 The mural is now in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia.
spiritually-enlightened—way of being. She expressed this through the sense of the figure floating upwards in many of her windows, most evocatively in *St Peter’s Sermon on the Morning of Pentecost* [Figure 4]. In the window Waller focused not on St Peter, but on the vision of Christ he prophesies. The pastel palette of the window renders a mystical quality to the image, which is reinforced by the upward thrust of the narrative. Geometric shapes and patterns direct the viewer’s eye to the top of the window, and symbolically, the heavens above from where Christ has descended. This approach is seen in other designs for stained glass. Waller does not show figures as part of a community but, instead, deep in internal reflection, at a distance from their surroundings. These distinctions assist in determining the major projects that were produced in collaboration, and those that were produced independently.

**The Divergence of Creative Interests**

The Wallers’ relationship between 1937 and Christian Waller’s death in 1954 lacked the creative intensity of their first two decades as a married couple. While this could be dismissed as a reflection of contemporary attitudes to marital separation, it seems the Wallers did have an ongoing—although non-traditional—union despite Napier Waller’s romantic relationship with Lorna Waller née Reyburn (1912–97), that began around 1937; they married in 1958.907 In the 1948 interview, Christian spoke of the all-consuming nature of her stained-glass commissions, which saw her work all day: “I haven’t been outside the front gate more than twice in four years. My husband does all the household shopping” 908. This reference to Napier Waller’s regular contact with his wife suggests an ongoing domestic relationship. It is reinforced by a condolence letter sent to May Macgeorge upon her husband’s death in 1952, Napier concluded the letter by writing that “Christian joins me with deepest sympathy” 909. Christian and Napier Waller continued to live at Fairy Hills until Christian’s death in

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907 After Christian Waller’s death, all of her artworks were removed from the house and given to Kyltie Pate.
908 Westhoven, “She Copes with a Five Year Queue...” p. 2.
Their was a marriage that did not fit the traditional mould, yet was immensely productive and influential for each party.

It was also during this time that Napier Waller began to assist Christian Waller with the five-year backlog of her stained-glass commissions. As historian Susan Kellet has shown, Napier Waller alluded to his wife’s poor health in correspondence regarding the mosaic and stained glass commission for the Hall of Memory, the Australian War Memorial (AWM), Canberra. In 1947 he wrote to John Treloar (1894–1952), then Director of the AWM, and stated that some of Christian’s “very long delayed work has kept me tied up recently” and added that “I feel her illness and mind maybe relieved when this work is cleared from her”. As explained in Chapter Five, Christian Waller’s normal working method was to get an agreement on a theme and design before making the work, which means it is likely that the aid to which Napier Waller’s referred was in the physical creation of the windows. The nature of Christian Waller’s illness is not specified, but it appears to have plagued her for much of the 1940s and 1950s. While it has been suggested that she suffered from mental health issues stemming from her husband’s extra-marital affair, I have not found concrete primary evidence to support this claim and therefore treat it circumspectly. Given the methodical way in which she worked hampered by her unspecified health condition, it may have been that she was simply behind on commissions, and required practical assistance in the same way in which she had earlier assisted her husband.

910 Lorna Reyburn lived in an apartment in Spring Street in central Melbourne. Napier Waller would often stay with her. When they married in 1958, Reyburn moved into the Waller house at Fairy Hills.


912 Napier Waller to John Treloar, 31 July 1944. Australian War Memorial Registry Files—Second Series, Building AWM—Hall of Memory—Employment of Staff for Assisting Mr Waller, General Correspondence, 234/005/024, 1953–1958. Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

913 Napier Waller refers to his wife’s poor health in letters regarding his AWM commission on several occasions during the 1940s and early 1950s. See: “Official History, 1914–18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian,” (Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 1940–1959);

In contrast to the dynamic artworks that Christian and Napier produced collaboratively in the 1930s, the work of the 1940s is less successful. Miley has drawn attention to the visible influence of Napier Waller in the stained glass Christian Waller produced in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{915} This is seen in a window, \textit{The Descent of the Spirit of God} (1940) [Figure 205], produced for St Barnabas', West Wyalong, New South Wales. There are significant differences between this window and the others that Christian Waller produced for the church, which is noticeable in the painted lettering and the fact it is not signed.\textsuperscript{916} The stillness and lack of mystical atmosphere that is particularly striking when compared with the others; as detailed in Appendix D. The flatness of \textit{The Descent of the Spirit of God} may have come about due to Napier Waller having worked off his wife’s design—rather than being involved in developing it himself—and as a consequence of working quickly to complete an overdue commission. His reluctance to design the \textit{Grice Memorial Window}, attests to his awareness that he and his wife had different approaches to stained glass and indicates a desire for Christian Waller’s clients receive work that she designed and made.

Other windows that suggest Napier Waller’s involvement include the \textit{He Ascended} [Figure 206] and \textit{All Things New} [Figure 207] (both c. 1950) upper nave windows created for St Mark’s, Camberwell, Victoria. The official history of the church cited Christian Waller as the artist of these windows, and included a summary of her notes on the imagery.\textsuperscript{917} When their unveiling is discussed, the author observed that they are the first examples of Napier Waller’s windows in the church, suggesting that he may have been the artist who made them; perhaps to Christian Waller’s designs.\textsuperscript{918}

\textsuperscript{915} Caroline Miley, “Towards the Light: Christian Waller’s Stained Glass,” ibid., ed. David Thomas (Bendigo Fine Art Gallery), p. 45.  
\textsuperscript{917} Elsewhere in the book all of Christian Waller’s signed stained-glass windows are attributes to Napier Waller. The height of All things New and \textit{He Ascended} makes it difficult to determine whether they were signed, however in the bottom right-hand corner of \textit{He Ascended} a faint signature which appears to be Christian Waller’s is just visible.  
\textsuperscript{918} Margaret A. Hookey, \textit{St Mark’s Camberwell: The First Seventy-Five Years} (Camberwell: The Vestry of St Mark’s Church, 1988), p. 86. See Appendix D for more information.
I have located two designs by Waller that I identify as preliminary studies for these windows. One of these [Figure 208] includes both windows and features numerous annotations about Christ, and includes the phrase “he made all things new” in the lower right. In this and a tracing design [Figure 209] for _He Ascended_ the figure is shown rising towards the heavens with flowing line used to emphasise the upward movement, whereas the heavens are represented by a shaft of lift in the upper centre of the image that echoes that seen in _The Spirit of Light_ [Figure 104] from _The Great Breath_. In _All Things New_ Christ is shown with the world in front of him, with human
figures representing humankind shown on the globe. Rays of light emanate from his head, and a holy dove flies downwards to his head. The mystical feel of the design is less pronounced in the finished window, which while clearly showing her involvements—seen in the use of colour, the clothing of the central figures and the background motifs—Napier Waller’s influence is notable. It can be seen in the way the figures appear grounded—especially in *He Ascended*—and in the fact the globe was been removed from *All Things New* and the figure is instead shown holding a scroll and raising one hand to the heavens. The absence of curved forms around his lower body makes the work much more humanistic in style, something that characterised Napier Waller’s stained glass and is seen in windows such as the multilight *Transfiguration* (1952) [Figure 210] he made for St Mark’s.

Napier Waller’s collaborative relationship with his second wife has some parallels to his and Christian Waller’s. Before and after their marriage, Lorna Waller was his stained-glass ‘assistant’. As well as providing practical assistance, she contributed stained glass and mosaic commissions and was not formally credited for her contributions. Her name appears in numerous official records and correspondence relating to the Hall of Memory commission, due to her role in supervising war

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919 Files related to the completion of the mosaic work in the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, list Lorna Reyburn as assistant to Napier Waller. She was responsible for overseeing the group of war widows who carried out the physical task of assembling the mosaic.

See: Australian War Memorial Registry Files—Second Series. Building AWM—Hall of Memory—Employment of Staff for Assisting Mr Waller, General Correspondence, 234/005/024, 1953–1958.

920 Kerry Pauli, Lorna Waller Retrospective (Carlton, VIC: Gryphon Gallery, 1988), unpaginated.
widows who were engaged to fix the tesserae.\textsuperscript{921} What this shows is that Waller was comfortable collaborating with his spouse; in fact, it was his normal way of working.

Lorna Waller’s involvement in the project does not preclude the contribution of Christian Waller, a further sign that they continued to worked together—albeit with less creative intensity—after their rift. Files regarding the purchase of glass for the stained-glass windows in the Hall of Memory include correspondence from a glass supplier in New York, S. A. Bendheim Co. Ltd.\textsuperscript{922} The letter, dated 12 December 1939, recalls the visit by Christian Waller to discuss antique glass: “We had the pleasure of Mrs. [Christian] Waller’s visit to our premises and we understand that you are interested in Antique Glass”.\textsuperscript{923} This comment strongly indicates Christian Waller played a role in her husband’s commission for the Hall of Memory. While the exact nature of this role cannot be assessed due to the lack of extant ephemera, it clearly continued beyond the rift in the couple’s personal relations: they continued to work together professionally after 1937 although not to the extent they did prior to this time.

Christian and Napier Wallers’ relationship was never traditional. They were married when Napier Waller was living in an army training camp and Christian was living with her mother and siblings in Melbourne and theirs was a childless union. This may explain why they were able to live under one roof for almost twenty years after Napier Waller’s extramarital affair became known. Non-traditional marriages like the Wallers’ were not uncommon. Phyllis Rose, in her book \textit{Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages} (1984), discussed creative couples in unconventional marriages:

> There must be other models of marriage—of long-term association between two people—than the very narrow one we are all familiar with, beginning

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[21]{Napier Waller began discussions regarding the stained glass and mosaics for the Hall of Memory with the inaugural Director of the Australian War Memorial, John Linton Treloar (1894–1952)—who held the post from 1920 until his death—and war historian Charles Edwin Woodrow "C. E. W." Bean (1879–1968), as early as 1926 and designed the cartoons for stained glass c. 1930. However, the project was delayed by the Great Depression and the outbreak of the Second World War, and he did not commence the work until the late 1940s-early 1950s. See: Ibid; Charles E. W. Bean, Official History, 1914–18 War: Records of Charles E. W. Bean, Official Historian, SDRL 6673/660, 1924–1928. Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Charles E. W. Bean, Official History, 1914–18 War: Records of Charles E. W. Bean, Official Historian, SDRL 6673/665, 1931–1939. Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Charles E. W. Bean, Official History, 1914–18 War: Records of Charles E. W. Bean, Official Historian, SDRL 6673/666, 1940–1959. Australian War Memorial, Canberra.}
\footnotetext[22]{Susan Elizabeth Mary Kellett, "Australia’s Martial Madonna: The Army Nurse’s Commemoration in Stained Glass Windows (1919–1951)" (PhD, University of Queensland, 2016), pp. 140–41.}
\end{footnotes}
with the white wedding gown, leading to children, and ending in death, or, these days increasingly often, in divorce.\textsuperscript{924}

Rose’s comments highlight the tendency to view marriages like the Wallers’ as abnormal. However, as she argues, the traditional view of marriage is limited. Simply because they had a non-traditional marriage—particularly after 1937—does not mean their creative bond was any less significant than that experienced between couples in so-called ‘traditional’ marriages. Viewed another way, the Wallers united their passions a through their collaborative art practices. Christian Waller’s devotion to God and Napier Waller’s extra-marital relationship did not necessarily detract from the love and mutual respect the Wallers shared during their marriage. Nor should it diminish their legacy both as independent practitioners and successful collaborators.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Together, the Wallers produced some of the finest monumental artworks created in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century. Extant scholarship on these works has focussed its attention on the artistic ‘genius’ of Napier Waller and silenced the significant contributions of Christian Waller. This chapter has drawn attention to their mutually influential relationship—in particular the years leading up to their romantic rift in 1937—and has moved her from the periphery to the centre of the creation of several major artworks.

This revision has been assisted by theories of collaboration. While it is true that, in the final decade of her life, Waller retreated into a world of spiritual enquiry, expressed through ecclesiastic stained glass commissions, this does not account for her whole period of artistic activity, nor should it detract from her collaborative relationship with her husband and her significant contribution to monumental artworks across a range of media. In the final chapter, Chapter Seven, I examine the central role of symbolic spiritual expression in Waller’s art, focusing on the last period of her life.

Chapter Seven

Addressing the Spiritual Through Art: Waller’s Personal Set of Symbols

Figure 211: Jack Cato, Christian Waller, c. 1935, gelatin silver photograph, 24.3 x 18.8 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Ms Klytie Pate, Member, 1999
In the previous chapter, I analysed Christian and Napier Waller’s collaborative relationship and argued that Christian Waller’s art increasingly expressed a spiritual outlook whereas Napier Waller’s was humanistic in orientation. Attention in this final chapter moves to the symbols Christian Waller used to articulate the spiritual motivation of her art making, focusing on the period from 1932 until her death in 1954. It was during this time that she refined her personal set of symbols in her work. In the 1948 interview she declared that her artistic drive was “to get the message through… to make religion real”, and employed symbols from a variety of sources to ‘get’ this message through. Theories of Iconography, Iconology and Semiotics are drawn on to provide a methodological framework for understanding her use of symbols.

A primary objective of this chapter is to analyse the way Waller drew on various orthodox and occult spiritual philosophies to develop a personal set of symbols. Rather than aligning to any particular spiritual philosophy, I show that she was a spiritual enquirer, who sought inspiration from a wide variety of creative and mystical sources when formulating her language of symbols. Predominantly, they were: the sun, the moon, stars and flowers. These symbols have a prominent presence in the art she produced from the 1930s and were employed to express her personal, pantheistic sense of the spiritual and to encourage spiritual contemplation.

In this chapter I demonstrate that, during the final phase of her art making, Waller’s drive to act as an emissary became the primary motivator for her art practice and led her to transition from illustration and printmaking to monumental art forms, namely ecclesiastical stained glass and murals. First, I provide context for the use of symbols in art, concentrating on Symbolist art, due to its direct relevance to her practice. Second, drawing on new evidence, including a journal Waller kept between c. 1929–44, I analyse each of her key symbols and argue that they were increasingly included in her artworks as her practice matured. The chapter concludes with a critical analysis of several key works that Waller imbued with multiple personal symbols that reflect her values which she wished to communicate. In this way, the act of working as an independent artist, who only produced work that contained ‘a message’, meant that Waller was seeking to inspire spiritual contemplation in her audience.

Symbols and Art

Engagement with the symbolic potential of art underscored Waller’s art practice. This is evidenced by the symbols she used and the media in which she made art, as well as her working method. For this reason I argue that Waller’s art can only be fully appreciated through analysis of her use of symbols. Whereas a formal analysis of her art would focus on the form and colour of the work, an analysis of its symbolic qualities—using methods of Semiotics, Iconography and Iconology—concentrates on the meaning of the work. This enables us to comprehend each artwork as a symbol composed of numerous symbols that have particular significance within the cultural climate in which it was produced.

A Semiotic approach to art is a useful method for analysing Waller’s art. This is because such an approach centres on the symbols within the work of art—and the symbol of the work of art—as a method of communicating concepts and ideas distinct to the artist and their cultural environment. Art historian Alex Potts argued that when something is recognised as an artwork, it immediately becomes a symbol. For Potts, both the work of art as a whole and its individual components function as symbols. This includes the cultural symbols—such as flags, emblems and ecclesiastical objects—that may form part of the work. He went on to note that a viewer’s comprehension of the artwork is dependent upon their awareness of the codes it signifies.926

This notion that symbols are codes with particular meaning was central to the theories of Semiotics—including those developed by Umberto Eco—which are relevant to this study on Waller’s art. For Eco, a theory of semiotics offered the potential to explain the meaning of signs and the codes they represent.927 Although Eco’s theories were developed in relation to linguistics, they have relevance to visual art. An artist, like a writer, generally selects from a familiar set of symbols to craft a

927 This includes the individual choices made when selecting from available signals and then choosing a means to communicate the signal as a sign.
narrative—often with a hidden meaning—that the viewer decodes. This meaning may be readily apparent, or it may be arcane and only accessible to those with specialised knowledge. The end product is an attempt to communicate an idea; a word that has its etymological roots in concepts relating to visibility, a fact that reinforces the union between ideas and concepts and visual art.928

Building on these ideas Waller’s artworks are, I argue, composed of symbols that contribute an important didactic element to the works, which serve the function of encouraging spiritual engagement. In his classic book, *Man and His Symbols* (1964), Jung offered the following definition of a symbol that is useful for my analysis of Waller’s practice:

> What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown and hidden from us… a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.929

Here Jung explained that it is only when something is deployed in a capacity where it serves a communicative function and represents or implies a concept or an idea, does it become a symbol. His reference to the familiarity of some symbols makes the important point that, within a cultural context, certain symbols are generally comprehended by individuals within that culture. However, it may be difficult to ascertain any hidden meaning that familiar symbols might represent. For example an image of a flower might be easily identified as a flower, however awareness of other associations—such as spring, new life and growth—depends upon the cultural context. This has particular relevance to this study on Waller’s use of symbols, as she employed familiar natural symbols in her practice to convey spiritual concepts, many of which were arcane in nature.

Jung examined key symbols expressed throughout humanity and called these *archetypes*. In Jungian psychoanalytic theory an *archetype* is a symbol in the collective human unconsciousness that is developed to represent abstract concepts such as myths and legends.930 *Archetypes* include life events—birth, marriage, death etc.—key figures—the mother, the father, the hero etc.—and motifs—such as spiritual energy,
light and dark, the soul etc. He argued that these symbols exist in the unconscious of all humans, and that they manifest in different ways depending on cultural contexts and the degree of engagement with the unconscious. He also elaborated on the use of archetypes and cultural symbols to convey spiritual ideas. As he observed:

Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend. This is one reason why all religions employ symbolic language or images.

As systems of faith are concerned with concepts related to the sacred, in particular notions of transcendence, symbols can be an effective method of articulating spiritual concepts. As Jung argued: “it is the role of religious symbols to give a meaning to the life of man”. In this capacity, a symbol serves as a means of representing something that is believed to exist beyond the material world. While I am not analysing Waller’s art through the lens of psychoanalytical theory, Jung’s theories on symbols and archetypes are useful when evaluating her use of familiar symbols to express spiritual concepts in her art.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century—when Waller was born—a number of prominent Australian and European artists embraced symbols to depict personal interpretations of mystical concepts, including those associated with the Symbolist movement. The French capital, Paris, was the centre of Symbolist activity, and the movement spread across various parts of Europe, the United Kingdom and North America. Its influence on Australian art was particularly felt in the 1880s and 1890s. Along with Pre-Raphaelitism, Symbolism was a visual art and literary movement that emerged from the cultural malaise known as the fin de siècle, which clouded civilised society in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Many artists who were inspired by Symbolism reinterpreted myths and legends. The mystical philosophy of Swede Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) had a major

932 He added that archetypes particularly manifest in dreams, through which messages are conveyed to the conscious level and facilitate comprehension of the self and society.
933 Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 20.
934 Ibid., p. 21.
influence on Symbolism, as it did on Spiritualism and other alternative spiritual philosophies. In the visual arts, the movement offered an alternative to the natural verisimilitude and realism advanced by the Academy and other arbiters of taste. Key French artists included: Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes (1824–98), Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) and Odilon Rédon (1840–1916).

Puvis de Chavannes was an influence on Waller’s conception of the symbolic potential of her art. His mural *Inter artes et naturam (Between Art and Nature, 1888–90)* [Figure 212] painted for the Musée des Beaux-Arts in the French town of Rouen is exemplary of the frieze-like flatness of his art. The panoramic work incorporates townspeople engaged in activities that symbolize the virtues of the town. Despite the fact the figures are each shown carrying out various activities, they appear frozen in time and in their inner worlds. The composition imbues a poignant intensity to the work that is reinforced by the use of white and pale tones on the skin and clothing, making them look ethereal. A similar effect can be seen in Waller’s exquisite mural *The Robe of Glory* — the design for which is in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra [Figure 213] — in which the figures are also shown frozen in the middle of an important event, and colour is used to heighten the spiritual atmosphere of the narrative. I will analysis this work in greater detail later in this chapter, however what is important is to draw attention to the fact that Waller was aware of Symbolist art and it was one of the many artistic and spiritual influences that she harnessed to develop her personal aesthetic.

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941 She owned a copy of a 1912 monograph on the artist, demonstrating familiarity with his work.

Identified by the Author during a visit to the Waller House in July 2013.

La Scala, “Inventory—Napier Waller Library—9 Crown Road Ivanhoe,” p. 5.
In the next section I analyse Waller’s four key symbols and argue that they were each vital components of the visual language she employed to encourage spiritual engagement.

Waller and Her Symbols: The Sun, the Moon, Stars and Flowers

The sun is the preeminent symbol that Waller employed to represent God, wisdom and truth in her art. The sun possesses these qualities across ancient and modern spiritual beliefs and is associated with masculinity. According to traditional Christian views of creation, the sun—along with the moon and the stars—was made by God—who is presented as being male—on the fourth day. In these theories the sun is said to have brought light to the world and as a result, has become a symbol of truth due to its capacity to reveal all through its light.

In his seminal treatise Transcendental Magic, its Doctrine and Ritual (1854), French occultist Eliphas Levi (1810–75) offered the following explanation of the spiritual significance of the sun:

The sun of the divine world is the infinite, spiritual and uncreated light, which is verbalised, so to speak, in the philosophical world, and becomes the

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fountain of souls and of truth; then it incorporates and becomes visible light in the sun of the third world, the central sun of our suns, of which the fixed stars are the ever-living sparks.\textsuperscript{944}

Here Levi linked the sun with wisdom and truth and suggests that it feeds the growth of the human soul. This notion is symbolised in Waller’s \textit{The Gates of Dawn}, where the sun is an omnipresent force that illuminates—both physically and spiritually—the world inhabited by his daughter, who encourages Christopher and the Girl to overcome evil and follow her through to the sun to reach spiritual enlightenment.

Waller’s engagement with Egyptian myths and magical practices also informed her conception of the sun as a symbol for God, wisdom and truth. In ancient Egypt, for example, the sun god Ra was worshipped as the supreme god, from whom the Pharaohs descended. During the Amarna period of the fourth century BCE, the solar disc Aten assumed the role of preeminent creator god. He was depicted as a solar disc with long rays emanating all around, often with Ankhs, symbolising the life-giving power of the sun.\textsuperscript{945} Indeed, the Art Deco manner Waller employed in \textit{The Great Breath} reflects her awareness of Ancient Egyptian art and hieroglyphs—as detailed in notes in a sketchbook dating from the early 1930s—as well as the cult of Ra. The fact she possessed a copy of the influential New Kingdom funerary text \textit{The Book of the Dead} (1550–50 BCE), which detailed Egyptian beliefs regarding the sun, attests to her interest. Waller’s use of sun symbolism demonstrates her understanding of ancient Egyptian art and supports my argument that she was using the sun to represent the supreme god.

In her print “Perhaps it was the dark held out his hand,/ And morning came and stole his hand away” (1931) [Figure 214], produced for a poem of the same name by Harry Tatlock Miller, she similarly used sunrays both to demonstrate the spiritual power of the sun.\textsuperscript{946} The print shows a woman with long wavy hair and wearing a long robe standing on a bed of flowers as a large sun rises behind her. Her body faces the viewer and her head gestures towards a man shown in profile on the left wearing a black robe. The woman is the personification of morning who is shown ordering the departure of the man, who represents darkness. Although the sun is traditionally


\textsuperscript{946} This print was reproduced in the previously-mentioned journal Manuscripts.
associated with masculinity, here Waller combines the image of the woman with that of the sun, by having her dress blend into the sunrays through the use of striking vertical lines. This is an example of how Waller developed her own language of symbols to, in this instance, represent the spiritual power of women who have the capacity to chase away evil and facilitate spiritual enlightenment.

References to the sun are seen throughout Waller’s art and life. When she chose the name of her niece, Klytie Pate, she selected the name Clytie from Greek mythology, a woman who purportedly transforms into a sunflower.\(^{947}\) In her illustration for the cover of *Birth: A Little Journal of Australian Poetry* [Figure 215] she incorporated the astrological symbols of the sun in the letters ‘o’ within text that runs across the bottom of the illustration. The illustration depicts a man wearing a loincloth and playing a harp whilst standing on a mound of earth in the middle of a body of water. Waller subtly includes a flame coming out of his head, a symbol of religious passion and the Holy Spirit.\(^{948}\) As the head is associated with intellect and wisdom, the inclusion of the flame here represents the spiritual enlightenment of the figure. This prefigures her inclusion of the sun symbol and flames emerging from heads in *The

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\(^{947}\) Klytie Pate’s first name was originally Clytie, however she changed the first letter to a ‘K’ for numerological reasons, as suggested by her Aunt. Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, s. v. “Sunflower,” p. 293; Pate, “Klytie Pate Interviewed by James Murdoch.”

Great Breath, seen particularly in the designs *The Lords of The Flame* [Figure 216] and *The Lords of Venus* [Figure 217]. In the former, Waller combines the symbols of flames, reinforcing the connection between these symbols and signals that she was exploring with expressive use of the sun to represent God, truth and wisdom.

The concept of illumination expressed through the symbol of the sun and flames is present also in *The Gates of Dawn* and in designs for stained glass. For example, the frontispiece of *The Gates of Dawn* [Figure 218] depicts the Daughter of the Sun enthroned in front of a blazing sun with flame like rays. The figure appears at once static and also moving upwards out of the picture plane, with this effect suggesting that the energy of the sun is transporting her to the spiritual realm. Similarly, in a design for a rose window from the early 1930s that was not executed [Figure 219], Waller depicted Christ facing the viewer with his arms outstretched while two archangels flank him and hold a crown of thorns by his feet. The archangels each have a prominent orange flame on their forehead, while further symbolism related to the Trinity and God is seen above Christ’s head. A dove, symbolic of the Holy Spirit, points down towards his head in front of a yellow sun with stylised rays connecting to the top of Christ’s halo. Clearly then, she used the symbol of the sun and rays of the sun repeatedly throughout her work to represent God and spiritual wisdom.
The moon was another key symbol Waller incorporated into her art which she used to represent mysticism, the female power and the hidden order of life. In Classical mythology, the crescent moon was associated with virgin huntress Diana and the moon goddess Luna. The image of the Virgin Mary standing on a crescent moon represents her chastity. ⁹⁴⁹ Indeed, since ancient times the moon has been associated with femininity—partly due to the phases of the moon and its correlation with the menstrual cycle—and its capacity to facilitate fertilisation is associated with female reproduction. ⁹⁵⁰ Unlike the dominance of the sun, the moon is seen to play a more mysterious role in the universe. ⁹⁵¹ Accordingly, the moon is a key symbol that signifies the need to engage with the occult in order to open oneself to spiritual enlightenment.

Waller incorporated lunar symbolism into artworks that explored arcane concepts. This is apparent in the bookplates she made in the early 1930s, including *Ex Libris Hilda Elliott* (c. 1932) [Figure 220]. In the bookplate a woman—presumably the arts patron and businesswoman Hilda Elliott née Fink (1882–1969) for whom the bookplate was made—is shown in profile in the centre of the image, wearing a long flowing dress.

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⁹⁵¹ Fontana, *The Secret Language of Symbols: A Visual Key to Symbols and Their Meanings*, p. 120.

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Figure 219: Christus Rex, [Design for a Stained-Glass Window], c. 1933–34, gouache, ink and pencil on canvas, 30.7 x 23.3 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1977

Figure 220: *Ex Libris* for Hilda Elliott, c. 1932, linocut printed in black ink from one block. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Gift of Roger Butler 1993
and holding a water carrier. She stands on a bed of flowers that includes a large blossoming iris (one of Waller’s favoured floral symbols) a sphinx and a body of water. Stylised flowers are located in the upper right and left of the image. While the variety of symbols and Classical style dress of the figure indicate that the narrative is not located within a specific place or time, it is the lunar symbolism that is the most evocative aspect of the print. A large moon is shown behind the woman, with her face covering part of it while the rest encases her head as per a halo. She appears to be at one with the moon, and is shown in a state of intense contemplation, basking in its glow. Together with the symbols of fertility represented by the large lily, the narrative highlights the mystical power of the woman by showing how she channels the energy of the moon to facilitate natural growth around her.

Stars are also important symbols that Waller included in her art to represent divinity and the sacred. She favoured six, seven and eight-pointed stars that each possessed specific spiritual and occult meaning. In Classical mythology, stars were associated with mysticism and astrology, which informed Christian views on the heavenly bodies. As with the gods and goddesses, Christian figures—including Christ, the Virgin Mary and saints are frequently associated with stars. This is seen in the description of Christ as the “bright star of dawn” in the Book of Revelation, that the Magi followed the six-pointed Star in the East—the Star of David—to find him and the fact that he wears a crown of stars.

Waller’s personal use of the symbol of the star to articulate divinity is notable in a mural, _The Sower_, she designed during her time in the USA in 1939–40, when she was a disciple of the African-American spiritual leader Father Divine. _The Sower_ was made to promote Father Divine’s teaching when she was briefly living in Harlem, and was reproduced in the Peace Mission Movement’s magazine _The New Day_. Further, I have located preliminary sketches for _The Sower_ in a private collection in regional Victoria, which confirms that Waller created this work [Figures 221–22].

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952 Elliott likely became acquainted with Waller through her father, newspaper proprietor Theodore Fink, who initiated the Newspaper House Mosaic. Napier Waller produced a lithographic portrait of Elliott, an impression of which is in the collection of the Mildura Arts Centre (that was founded Elliott and her husband, Robert Elliott); the matrix is at the Waller House.


954 I have identified the work based on a black-and-white photograph of an interior scene that included the mural, which was reproduced in McFarlane’s Master’s thesis.

In *The Sower*, Waller has conflated the images of the Christ figure, Father Divine (who was purported by his followers to be God), and the American concept of Uncle Sam. However, she has not used five-pointed stars on the figure’s jacket—as found on the Star Spangled Banner and on other artistic depictions of Uncle Sam—and has instead used her favoured six-pointed star. The hexagram has associations with spiritual focus and divination and here is used to symbolise that, through following Father Divine and the International Peace Mission Movement, spiritual clarity and access to higher wisdom and happiness—symbolised by the sun in the background—are attainable.
A star is a key motif on one of two murals Waller executed independently, her magnificent *Adoration* mural at Christ Church, Geelong, Victoria [Figure 224].\(^955\) The mural was completed in 1942 and depicts the story of the Adoration of the Magi (also known as the Nativity) from the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament in which the Magi follow the Star of David to find Jesus, the King of the Jews.\(^956\) Following artistic tradition, Waller depicted the Madonna and Child flanked by six angels, with the Magi shown in the bottom right bearing their gifts for the baby Jesus. The elder Magi kneel before Jesus, while Mary’s husband Joseph watches on from behind her left shoulder. In a departure from tradition the scene does not take place in the manger but, instead, on a white altar. This interpretation effectively removes the mural from standard Christian interpretations of the narrative; Waller has imbued her own sense of the spiritual into the work.

Waller’s portrayal of the star also departs from tradition and contributes an intense mystical energy to the mural. Rather than depicting the star in the sky in the background of the image, she situated it in the centre of the composition, directly above the enthroned Virgin and the Christ Child on her lap. The strong vertical rays of the star point down and connect to the Virgin’s head, as though they are

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\(^955\) By independently I mean that the mural was not produced in collaboration with her husband Napier Waller.

\(^956\) Matthew 2: 11, in: *King James Bible Online*. 
transmitting mystical energy. The pure white light that emanates from the star appears to illuminate the area surrounding the Virgin, further emphasising the importance of the symbol.

The angels are clad in white robes and have alabaster skin, heightening the mystical feel to the work. The contemporary design of the clothing contrasts with the historical setting of the narrative, in that every other figure is clothed in a manner befitting the historical time of the Adoration. The angels’ robes are modern, with geometric bands around the bodice and flowing down the centre. This difference highlights these angels and indicates their importance within the narrative, as does the penetrating bright white paint used to render their clothing. Each angel has pastel-coloured wings in shades of blue, purple and green. The angels’ hair is depicted through striking geometric linework, and it sticks out, as if charged with spiritual energy. Their androgynous features contribute a sense of mystery to the image.

The mural’s symbolism demonstrates Waller’s ongoing engagement with the International Peace Mission Movement, something she synthesised with the Christian foundation of her sense of the spiritual. Angels make a recurrent appearance in her œuvre from the time when she became a follower of Father Divine. Waller’s depiction of angels in stained glass has parallels with the Angels who serve Father Divine, as Waller herself did. In a letter to her friend, artist Ian Hanna, written while in the USA, Waller discussed angels: “it has been said by a great writer that man…Through aeons of years of suffering [moves] closer to God than the angels”.957 Her comments position humankind as having the potential to move closer to God than angels through spiritual growth, and she uses the symbol of the star to unify the relationship between the angels, the Virgin and Child and God. Angels are considered closer to God than humans, and this accounts for her treatment of the supernatural beings in the art she made during the 1940s.

Father Divine’s influence on Waller’s art and life has been established through new material that has come to light during this research. References to Father Divine appear in Waller’s Journal and Book of Stories. In an entry dated 23 April 1943 enclosed in her journal, Waller wrote of a dream-like encounter with Father Divine.

957 Christian Waller to Ian Hanna, c. 1939. Papers of Ian Hanna, MS 12896.
The entry, entitled *A Dream*, reads like a journal entry. In it Waller recounted a dream in which she walks through a doorway and into a dark room with two people inside. One of the figures is a “mystic looking” person whom Waller first believes to be male, but then realises is female. The mystic’s first question is whether Waller can dance and sing, to which she replies “yes”.

After the group fails to conjure the Father’s presence, Waller suggests they sing her simple song to Father. As she does so two “shadowy figures” approach her and attempt to draw life from her, one by placing his hands around her neck and presumably attempting to choke her. In response, Waller shouted out her song:

Sweet Father Divine is God.
Sweet Father divine is God.[
He is God, He is God, He is God almighty,
Sweet Father divine is God. 

The above provides a strong link between Christian Waller’s creative undertakings and Father Divine after she returned from Harlem in 1940. A key aspect of Divine’s teaching was positive ‘pure’ thinking. He argued that positive thinking was a way to channel God and, given he proclaimed himself to be God on earth, channelling Father Divine was an act of pure thinking. The purity of the angels and the star in *The Adoration* serve as visual cues to foster engagement with spiritual concepts regarding divinity and mysticism as represented by the star in Waller’s art.

Floral and natural imagery in Waller’s art serve to connect the physical and spiritual realms, and at the same time, signify spiritual growth. In many regards this is in keeping with traditions of Western art and culture, in which flowers represent Spring and fertility and hope. While Waller also used specific flowers for talismanic reasons—reflecting her knowledge of the symbolism of specific flowers seen in different spiritual and religious systems—it was a generic stylised flower that she preferred. For Waller these flowers—which were generally depicted as a halo or streaming floral garlands that echoed the rays of the sun—represent the connection between the material and the immaterial. Flowers grow and blossom as a result of photosynthesis, and literally feed off the sun. They also represent the evanescence of

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959 Watts, God, Harlem USA: The Father Divine Story, p. 145.
960 Hall, Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art, s. v. “Star,” p. 289.
human life and the concept of reincarnation, something Waller alluded to in personal correspondence.

Waller’s incorporation of floral imagery in the print *Untitled [Joan of Arc/ The Annunciation]* (c. 1928) [Figure 225] exemplifies how she used stylised flowers to signify spiritual growth. Floral imagery is used to represent the transference of spiritual wisdom between the Angel of the Annunciation, also known as the Archangel Gabriel, and Joan of Arc (c. 1412–31). The print portrays the Angel of the Annunciation on the right of the image, shown levitating in a halo of sinuous flames—peppered with blossoming flowers—that float amongst the flames and also form a loose garland that wraps around his image; his hair blown back by the wind, emphasising its linearity and weightlessness. The angel holds an immaculate blooming flower out to Joan, as though offering her the gift of spiritual insight. She appears frozen and unable to comprehend the scene in front of her, with the humble nature of her lifestyle emphasised by the fact she is shown wearing simple clothes, without shoes and holding wooden buckets in either hand, implying that she has been engaging in farm work.

The story of Joan of Arc is symbolic of spiritual enlightenment; something the artist herself was experiencing at the time of its creation, via her increasing interest in alternative spiritual philosophies. The Angel of the Annunciation, is also associated with the Immaculate Conception, an important Christian story. In the Bible, the
Angel informs the Virgin Mary of her pregnancy, in a similar way that Joan of Arc was sent messages from God.¹⁶¹ Burne-Jones’ painting *The Annunciation* (1876–79) [Figure 226], which symbolises the story of the Virgin, has similarities to Waller’s *Joan of Art* through its narrative, which depicts the Angel surprising the figure of Joan/Mary in an outdoor setting. The figure of the Angel, moreover, is elongated in both works, and surrounded by plant life. Waller’s print highlights her awareness of Burne-Jones’ Pre-Raphaelite-cum-Symbolist aesthetic, and expresses similar themes in a distinctive fashion; utilising the modern medium of linocutting to depict floral imagery.

Waller’s symbolic inclusion of stylised natural imagery to represent the connection between the natural and spiritual realms in her art is also seen through her references to the Tree of Life. In Christianity, the Tree of Life was one of the two trees, together with the Tree of Knowledge, that God planted in the Garden of Eden.¹⁶² It appears in the rose window, *Christ the King of All Nations* (1932) [Figure 227]. The window depicts Christ flanked by citizens of the four corners of the world: Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa. Waller incorporated references to these parts of the world in the traditional costumes worn by the four men, whose facial features and skin tones indicate their cultural ancestry. Each man sits or kneels in prayer or devotion, with their bodies facing Christ. They are connected to Christ by the sinuous branches and leaves springing from the tree which Christ appears to be

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¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 19.

growing out from, and which is also growing within him. This imagery links all of humankind together in worship of Christ, thereby symbolising a brotherhood of man, a philosophy central to the Theosophical thought and to the teachings of Father Divine.

This imagery in *Christ the King of All Nations* also serves to unite the natural and spiritual realms. The tree and its sprawling branches signal that from Christ all of life emerges, including the natural world. Furthermore, the natural world also connects human beings with one another. The window features a passage from The First Epistle to the Corinthians, the Seventh book in the New Testament: “for he must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet”, which highlights the divinity of Christ and, by extension, God.\(^{963}\) He has the power to bring all faiths together in his worship. The selection of this narrative indicates a belief in a Godhead who has the potential to create a brotherhood of humankind, a goal common to spiritual philosophies. Here Waller used the medium of stained glass to express her interpretation of this concept.

Waller’s favoured symbols—suns, moons, stars and flowers—were unified in key artworks that collectively draw attention to the omnipresence of God and spiritual wisdom (the sun), awareness of arcane spiritual powers (the moon), the link between the divine and the material (stars) and the connection between the natural and physical worlds (flowers). I argue that this demonstrates that Waller was a spiritually-directed artist, who engaged with different spiritual philosophies at different stages of her career, yet continued to draw on key symbols to express her personal sense of the sacred and to encourage spiritual engagement in the viewer.

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\(^{963}\) 1 Corinthians, 15: 25: *King James Bible Online.*
A powerful example of the spiritual unity of three of these symbols—the sun, stars and flowers—can be found in two linocuts that were partially printed from the same block; different block was used to print the text. The first print includes the words “CHRISTIAN WALLER”, and was used as the artist’s personal bookplate, whereas the second, a Christmas greeting card [Figure 75] includes the words “PEACE ON EARTH” [Figure 228]. The bookplate was included in books that have special significance to her, including A’s collected poems. In the prints Waller represented what appears to be the Christ Child who is standing with his arms outstretched and surrounded by a decorative floral scene. Above his head are two halos of stars and flowers in front of a blazing sun. The fact that Waller first reproduced this on a Christmas card made for friends and then on her personal bookplate indicates her self-identification with this image and desire to share its symbolic message: that peace can be attained through the seeking of greater wisdom.

The Robe of Glory (1937) [Figure 229] mural also exemplifies the way Waller synthesised her favoured symbols into an artwork that had an important didactic function. This mural has not been analysed in great detail by previous scholars, nor has its symbolism been identified. It was commissioned by the Fawkner Crematorium—in the greater-Melbourne suburb of Fawkner—and hung in the Crematorium Centre, where funeral services were held. A dearth of primary evidence has made it difficult to ascertain the degree of creative licence Waller was given over the mural, however the unconventional narrative and striking

964 The two blocks were exhibited in Butler’s 1978 exhibition and are included together in the catalogue as number 169.
965 Observed by the author during a visit to the Waller House in May 2011.
966 Waller’s ashes were interred at the crematorium following her death in 1954.
composition suggests that she was given the freedom to make a personal statement that would resonate with visitors to the Crematorium who were farewelling loved ones.

The mural depicts a story of spiritual evolution which sees the protagonist reach a higher plane of existence, a common theme in spiritual stories. The hymn tells the story of a young man from the ‘East’ who possesses a beautiful robe. His parents, the King of Parthia and the Queen of the dawn-land take the robe from him and hand down a task he must complete in order to regain the robe: he, their second son, must travel to Alexandria, in Egypt, and retrieve ‘the one’ pearl from a serpent, and bring it back to them. The King writes a letter for his son to take on the journey. The letter is brought to the boy by an eagle, who reads the letter to him. When he successfully takes the pearl, he returns home, guided by the mystical letter “On fabric of silk, in letter of red… Encouraging me with its guidance/ With its love it was drawing me onward”.

Upon his return, he is cloaked in the glorious robe. The return of the robe symbolises, according to author George Robert Stowe ‘G. R. S.’ Mead (1863–1933):

> Father-Mother, the Supreme Mystery, give the Glory-Robe of Spiritual Life and Light to the Twin-Powers of Spiritual Mind, to bestow it on the returning Victor (or Prodigal) ascending the Sacred Way in Triumph.

Accordingly, ‘earning’ the robe symbolises reaching a state of spiritual enlightenment, something that Theosophists sought to achieve through the comparative study of religions.

Waller highlighted the attainment of spiritual enlightenment in *The Robe of Glory* mural. Given that it was commissioned for display in the chapel of a crematorium, her choice of narrative offers insight into her views on death and reincarnation. She portrayed the triumphant return of the man to his home, as he presents the pearl to his parents and is cloaked by his parents’ “treasure dispensers” with the magnificent robe. The title—which is written at the base of the mural—is the first half of a couplet from the hymn “To the way that I came I betook me” the second line from

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968 Ibid., p. 91.
the couplet is “To the Light of our home, to the Dawn-land”. When appraised in
the context of the mural’s location, I argue that she was making a deliberate link
between death and the return to the immaterial world where she believed that
wisdom and spiritual fulfilment could be rediscovered by humankind.

Compositionally, Waller suggests an upward movement towards the sun and,
therefore, towards enlightenment. The man is shown in profile walking up steps
towards his parents, who sit on an altar. There is an upward thrust to his face as well
as his body, giving the impression that he is embracing not only the robe, but also
the spiritual evolution it represents. A large, glowing sun—that is similar to that in
the frontispiece of The Gates of Dawn and The Newspaper House Mosaic, as discussed
previously—is positioned directly in his line of sight, behind his parents. The robe is
being put on him by a man with a large golden star in the centre of his chest, who
wears a sun-like halo, while a boy stands facing the Prince and holding a large chalice
with a moon-like halo behind his head. Sun and moon symbolism is also seen in the
embellishments on the robes worn by a man shown in profile to the far left of the
image, who appears to be quietly recording the scene with a feather while writing in a
large book. Two varieties of stylised lotus flower around the altar. The lotus is a
symbol of the evolution of the soul towards a state of enlightenment.

Through the use of symbols, the composition implies that the Prince is moving
towards the sun, which aligns with the aforementioned second line of the couplet
after which the mural is named. Given the mural was commissioned for a
crematorium, the choice of narrative and composition of the mural engage with ideas
of the spiritual evolution of individuals that were central to the Theosophical
Society’s doctrine—an important influence on Waller at the time—suggests that the
souls of the dead live on in the “Dawn-land” located beyond the sun in the mural.

969 Ibid.
971 In The Key to Theosophy (1889) Blavatsky observed that: “this doctrine of Reincarnation has not its equal on earth. It is a belief in a perpetual
progress for each incarnating Ego, or divine soul, in an evolution from the outward into the inward, from the material to the Spiritual, arriving at the
end of each stage at absolute unity with the divine Principle. From strength to strength, from the beauty and perfection of one plane to the greater
beauty and perfection of another, with accessions of new glory, of fresh knowledge and power in each cycle, such is the destiny of every Ego,
which thus becomes its own Saviour in each world and incarnation”. Blavatsky, The Key to Theosophy: Being a Clear Exposition, in the Form of Question and Answer, of the Ethics, Science, and Philosophy for the
Study of Which the Theosophical Society Has Been Founded, p. 105.
Waller’s choice of narrative also reflects her engagement with the Golden Dawn during the 1930s. The narrative was based on a somewhat obscure Gnostic hymn that was used by the Order to attract followers.972 The hymn is based on Mead’s 1908 translation of the Gnostic hymn *The Hymn of the Robe of Glory* (also known as *The Hymn of the Pearl*). Mead included the hymn in his ten-volume series *Echoes from the Gnosis* (1906–8). The series was written for the average reader and formed part of a campaign to attract people to alternative spiritual philosophies.973 Mead stated this himself at the front of each entry in the series:

> Under this general title [*Echoes from the Gnosis*] is now being published a series of small volumes, drawn from, or based upon, the mystic, theosophic and Gnostic writings of the ancients, so as to make more easily audible for the ever-widening circle of those who love such things, some echoes of the mystic experiences and initiatory lore of their spiritual ancestry. There are many who love the life of the spirit, and who long for the light of gnostic illumination… [these books] may become… stepping-stones to higher things.974

The above passage highlights Mead’s ambition for the series to engage and educate new and prospective member of the Order. The term “stepping-stones to higher things” at the end of the paragraph explicitly states this aim. The word ‘higher’ in this context links with the view advanced by the Theosophical Society and the Order of the Golden Dawn that, through the study of comparative religions and the guidance of advanced followers, it is possible to attain higher wisdom.

Waller’s familiarity with Mead’s work, my research reveals, came about through her friend John Trinick. In the Waller House are two of the eleven titles in the *Echoes of the Gnosis* series: *The Hymn of Jesus (Vol. IV)* and *The Hymn of the Robe of Glory (Vol. X)*. The front endpapers of the books contain the inscription “Mervyn and Chris, from Jack. London” with the inscription on the former dated “Nov. 20th 1922” and the latter “Nov. 30th 1922”.975 It is highly likely that Trinick was acquainted with Mead,
as they were both active in London occult circles in the 1920s. Mead, a former Secretary of the Theosophical Society and Private Secretary to Blavatsky, was the preeminent Theosophical scholar from the 1880s through to when he resigned from the society in 1909 (at which time he established the satellite Quest Society). Furthermore, Trinick’s friend Waite was Vice President of the Quest Society; Mead was the President. Accordingly, by sending the Wallers books from the Echoes of the Gnosis series, Trinick was either building on their existing interest in literature related to alternative spiritual philosophies, or introducing them to it.

Conclusion

Waller developed a personal set of symbols to communicate spiritual values in her art. She was, therefore, a part of the international discourse of art that addressed the sacred. Her engagement with the spiritual philosophies of Theosophy, the Order of the Golden Dawn and the International Peace Mission Movement—as well as the Christian foundation of her sense of the spiritual—contributed to the importance she placed on creating art with a message. She combined Christian symbolism with mystical themes and symbols to express her sense of the sacred. Through analysis of the narratives and symbolism used by Waller—namely her favoured symbols of the sun, the moon, stars and flowers—her sense of the sacred becomes clearer than in previous studies on her work. In the Conclusion, I identify the key findings of this research on Waller’s art and life.

977 Waite is best known for co-creating the Rider-Waite Tarot deck in 1910, which is the standard deck used in the English-speaking world. The cards were illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith, under Waite’s direction, and were published in London by William Rider & Son. See: Jensen, The Story of the Waite-Smith Tarot.
Conclusion

Figure 230: Tailpiece, 1932, 6.3 x 2.8 cm, from: Manuscripts: The Book Nook Miscellany, edited by Harry Tatlock Miller, Geelong: Book Nook, no. 2 (June), p. 193
This study has demonstrated for the first time that Christian Waller developed spiritual themes and ideas across media during the period from 1909 to 1952, and expressed these through her personal set of symbols. Evidence I have uncovered supports my argument that Waller sought to create art that communicated spiritual values to her audience. In so doing, she was committed to Arts and Crafts values regarding the conception, design and production of art. This drive led her first to book illustration and then printmaking and book making, and finally to monumental art, most notably in the medium of ecclesiastical stained glass.

Key Findings

Through a critical analysis of Waller’s art and life, this thesis contributes an enhanced understanding of her œuvre. This has been achieved through four main lines of enquiry. First, the key influencing factors on Waller’s art that informed its aesthetic and symbolic characteristics, namely, the importance of creating art with a message (didactic art) was explored. Secondly, a number of artworks that have been glanced over, misinterpreted, or neglected entirely in previous scholarship on the artist—as well as works that have emerged during this research—have been brought into discussion. Thirdly, a theoretical frame of reference was used to position Waller within the discourse of spiritual art, drawing on theories of Iconography, Iconology and Semiotics. Finally, extant scholarship on Waller’s art has been critiqued.

This thesis was divided into seven thematic chapters, which were arranged in a broad chronology of key developments in Waller’s art and life. The first chapter, Chapter One, provided a platform for approaching her art and the international discourse of spiritual art. Through a detailed review of literature on Waller, I demonstrated that the full breadth of her art has until now not received focussed scholarly attention, and I drew attention to the limitations of previous studies. Spiritual art was then outlined and defined, focussing on the modern period of the early-twentieth century, when Waller was active. Key methodologies of this research—namely Iconography, Iconology, Semiotics and Connoisseurship—were introduced and defined. The key contribution of this chapter was demonstrating how Waller’s art fits within the discourse of spiritual art, although it has not previously been explicitly located in this
discourse, and by the introduction of the methods that facilitate analysis of her use of symbolism.

New information was drawn on to provide a context for Waller’s development as an artist between 1906 and 1922 in Chapter Two. This included a sketchbook dating from c. 1909, when Waller was studying under Hugh Fegan. A key finding was how Waller’s Celtic ancestry and formative artistic influences shaped the direction of her art much earlier than had been established by other scholars. Specifically, I traced Waller’s engagement with the values of the Arts and Crafts Movement, along with her interests in mystical and medieval narratives, to her student years in Castlemaine and Bendigo. This was achieved through an analysis of the place of sketching in Waller’s art practice, an aspect of her œuvre that has not previously been examined in great detail, and analysis of the influence of the South Kensington system of art tuition on her artistic development.

The third chapter, established that Waller’s children’s book illustrations, produced in the 1920s, were catalysts that saw her harness both Arts and Crafts values and the didactic potential of the work of art. This demonstrated the significance of Waller’s children’s book illustrations—which are a dimension of her work that has been glanced over by other scholars, or looked at in isolation of her wider artistic output—indicating they were not previously considered to be as significant as works she produced in the media of printmaking and stained glass.

A key contribution from Chapter Three to scholarship on Waller is a critical assessment of Waller’s mystical children’s book The Gates of Dawn: A Book Made for the Young (1932), a work that has not received scholarly attention, despite the fact it was entirely written, illustrated and designed by Waller. I uncovered the original manuscript for this book, and analysed it to determine the objective behind the work. This showed that Waller built on her previous experience producing illustrations for books written by others to create a homogenous work that fulfilled both the Arts and Crafts concept of the ‘ideal book’ and her commitment to creating art with a message: the book communicated ideas of spiritual enlightenment ‘to the young’.

The way in which Waller’s major work, The Great Breath: A Book of Seven Designs (1932) came into being was established in Chapter Four. New analysis of the work firmly situated it within the context of the Celtic Revival and the Arts and Crafts
Movement. It departed from previous studies, which have focused on Theosophical symbolism in the seven designs. This was achieved by outlining the international network of like-minded artists and spiritual ‘guides’ with whom Waller interacted during her travels to England, Ireland and Europe in 1929–30. Like Waller, these artists and writers promoted the importance of creating art with a message.

Specifically, I demonstrated that Waller’s engagement with Theosophical ideas was filtered through the writings of Irish Theosophist George William Russell ‘Æ’, whom she met in Ireland. Nourished by her travels, following her return to Australia Waller produced a body of work in which her aesthetic and spiritual values are intertwined, including *The Great Breath*.

In Chapter Five I showed how Waller’s embrace of the medium of ecclesiastical stained glass built on her Arts and Crafts values and commitment to making art with a message. A key contribution of this chapter was demonstrating how, in stained glass, Waller found the ultimate means of communicating her spiritual and aesthetic ideals in a manner that allowed her to express her individual artistic style. Her journey towards becoming an independent stained-glass artist was mapped out, including: the mentorship she received from William Montgomery in the mid-1920s, the time she spent at the Whall & Whall Ltd. studio in London in 1929, where she studied under Veronica Whall, daughter of the studio’s founder Christopher Whall, and the collaborative relationship she enjoyed with Anglican church architect Louis R. Williams.

A second key contribution of Chapter Five was the new argument I introduced which linked Waller’s approach to the medium, as outlined in her essay “A Stained-Glass Window” (1931), to the seminal text by Christopher Whall *Stained Glass Work* (1905) and Veronica Whall’s essay “Glass, Lead—and Light” (1935). I found a copy of Whall’s text in the Waller House, which Waller had signed on the inner cover, proving her familiarity with the Whalls’ principles.

Christian and Napier Waller’s collaborative relationship was critically assessed in Chapter Six, the penultimate chapter. It debunked the accepted view in Australian art history that Napier Waller significantly influenced his wife’s artistic development. New evidence was drawn on to dispel this narrow view, which expresses gender bias and fails to recognise the collaborative strength of the relationship and the benefits of it on the work of Napier Waller. This was achieved by focusing on several major
works that I proved were produced collaboratively by the Wallers, such as the Arts and Crafts style house, the Waller House (featuring bespoke painted furniture) they designed and decorated in the outer Melbourne suburb of Ivanhoe (c. 1920–22). Other key collaborative works analysed included the *Five Lamps of Learning* (1931), *The Lockie Window* (1935) and the *Myer Mural Hall* (1935). I gathered together various pieces of information that point to Christian Waller’s involvement in several major works that remain attributed to Napier Waller. I identified instances of misattribution on a number of preliminary sketches and studies for murals and stained glass that were clearly executed by Christian Waller, as evidenced by her drawing style and the inclusion of her handwriting. In this chapter, I reframed perceptions of the Wallers’ relationship to demonstrate that it was a mutually influential dynamic.

In Chapter Seven I analysed the personal set of symbols Waller developed to communicate spiritual concepts through her art. This was achieved firstly by providing a theoretical and historical context to the use of symbols in art. A key finding was my identification of her primary symbols as the sun, the moon, stars and flowers, and my analysis of key works in which these symbols were incorporated to represent mystical concepts. Sentiments Waller expressed in the journal I uncovered during my research were introduced to reinforce my argument concerning the spiritually and socially-directed aims of her art practice.

**Summary**

Together these findings suggest that the potential of the work of art to cultivate spiritual contemplation was central to Waller’s art practice. Further, throughout her career, she was guided by Arts and Crafts values, including the emphasis placed on the artist’s individual expression. Another major finding was that the prevailing view of her in Australian art history is narrow and erroneous. She has largely been considered within the geographic context within which she worked, rather than the international context of like-minded artists and creative individuals who also contributed to the discourse of spiritual art which, as I have demonstrated, she was closely connected to. Furthermore, I proved that she collaborated with her husband Napier Waller on a number of major projects.
This thesis extends our knowledge of the breadth of—and motivation behind—Christian Waller’s artistic output. It provides a more detailed understanding of Australian art history in the inter-war period by shedding light on a largely misunderstood and underappreciated artist who produced work with themes and objectives that contrasted with those of her more prominent contemporaries.

To conclude, I return to Waller’s observation that epitomised the motivation behind her work: “my life is to get the message through… to make religion real”.979 The language of symbols was the primary means through which she created art that was intended to inspire spiritual awareness.

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