



Enid Lorimer

Also Known As:

Enid Bosworth Nunn, Mrs. Wentworth Zerffi

Lived:

December 27, 1887 - July 15, 1982

Worked as:

business co-owner, co-screenwriter, scenarist, theatre actress, theatrical entrepreneur, title writer

Worked In:

United Kingdom: England

by Mirte Terpstra

Enid Lorimer was born in London in 1887 as Enid Bosworth Nunn. She eventually became an Australian citizen, however, and died in Sydney on July 15, 1982, a month after she received a Medal of the Order of Australia for the Performing Arts. Lorimer was a theatre actress almost all her life, but also participated in many radio plays and television series in both Britain and Australia. Much less is known about her involvement as a scenarist in the early British film industry. As a result only one confirmed writing credit exists for Lorimer. Although Lorimer was asked about her involvement in early film as part of an interview for the Australia Film Council *On Stage!* series in 1979, by that time she was ninety-one and not surprisingly did not recall the full details. Another factor in our limited knowledge of Lorimer's early film career is the lack of attributed credits for early British films. Few extant film prints survive, and as a rule, the trade press did not mention either scenarists or other production staff (Wolstencroft 2009).

Lorimer was born into an upper-middle class family from London. After she graduated, former teacher Elsie Fogerty persuaded Lorimer's parents to let her participate in Fogerty's drama classes at the Royal Albert Hall in 1911. In 1912, with Fogerty's help, Lorimer joined the theatre company of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and this is when Enid adopted "Lorimer" as a stage name. She took mainly understudy parts, reading for Phyllis Neilson-Terry, for example. Lorimer acted at several companies, including Sir Laurence Irving's, where she met fellow actor Wentworth Zerffi, whom she married in July 1912. By 1914, Lorimer even had her own repertory company in Manchester, but with the outbreak of World War I and Zerffi enlisting, everything changed.

It was at this moment in late 1914 that Lorimer was probably first contracted to a film company as an actress. But since, in her words, "I was tall, and at that time what was wanted were little fluffy

types,” she ended up working “more or less as general dogsbody, writing them, which meant of course writing the subtitles which was all that writing consisted of.” This sounds very modest, but later in the 1979 *Stage Series* interview Lorimer speaks of “my office,” which was located near the manager’s office. The question is: exactly for whom did she work?

It appears that Lorimer initially worked for the Samuelson Film Company, although we have no evidence of this. In the Australia Film Council’s *On Stage!* interview, Lorimer mentions Samuelson in connection with anecdotes about films that were actually made by the Ideal Film Company. Ideal, however, did not start making films until late 1915. Nevertheless, Lorimer’s one confirmed scenarist credit was for the Ideal Company. This was *Her Greatest Performance* (1916), which she cowrote with Benedict James. James was a regular writer for Ideal and often teamed up with actor-director Fred Paul until they both left Ideal in late 1917. Interestingly, Paul acted for Samuelson and directed his first film, *The Dop Doctor* (1916), for them before he joined the new Ideal Company. Lorimer remembers Samuelson as having “the first ever studio at Elstree” while they in fact had their studios at Worton Hall, Isleworth. Ideal, in contrast, did not have its own studios and started filming at Worton Hall at the beginning of 1916, before moving on to Elstree at the end of that year and staying until 1917. All this suggests that Lorimer probably first worked for Samuelson at Worton Hall and then moved with Ideal to Elstree and possibly with director Fred Paul (Low 89, 92-93; Burrows 192, 196-187, 218).

Two of the anecdotes Lorimer related in the *On Stage!* interview suggest that she was at least part of the production staff on two other Paul films. First, Lorimer was on the set of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1916), adapted by Benedict James, as she remembers the actor Bernard Vaughn, who was a “very dignified [...] old man,” but in contrast “had a good old ripe Cockney accent.” Lorimer comments that writing intertitles could be very amusing because the actors did not have to stick to the words. And apparently Vaughn would come on set and say, “Well, Gentleman, what seems to be the problem?” What would come out would be “Well, me old duck, what’s it all about?” So, Lorimer focused on the title words in the interview because she may have been the one who wrote them (Low 300).

In the second anecdote Lorimer says she saw the actor James Welch angrily storming into the manager’s office on the day Ideal was filming “the big circus scene” for the comedy *The New Clown* (1916). Interestingly, Low refers to the intertitles from this film as described in the *Kinematograph Monthly Film Record* in July 1916. “Who, for instance, could help laughing at subtitles such as this: “What is the number of my dressing room?” “Dressing room! It’s the second flap on the right behind the camel” (130). Low uses *The New Clown* as an example of the development of comedies through the comic title rather than through the script or actors (Low 167). It is perhaps too tempting to think that Lorimer may have written these particular titles. One, I think erroneous scenarist credit for Lorimer is that of the Broadwest film *The House Opposite* (1917). In his record of the film, Dennis Gifford gives the adaptation credit to both Enid Lorimer and Reuben Gillmer, possibly to rule out doubts. *The Bioscope* probably simply made a mistake when they referred to the script in their news columns as being “prepared for the film by Enid Lorimer,” because on other occasions they mentioned only Reuben Gillmer as the

scriptwriter. It was never suggested that they adapted the play together or that Lorimer ever worked for Broadwest. Moreover, Gillmer leaves no room for doubt in his indignant reaction to the *Bioscope's* mistake, saying he himself wrote the script without assistance. Ironically, the subsequent review of *The House Opposite* in the *Bioscope* does not mention any scriptwriter at all. Equally tempting is the knowledge that there are some other Ideal films directed by Fred Paul for which Low does not give a scriptwriting/adaptation credit. These titles include *Still Waters Run Deep* (1916) starring Lady Tree and *The Lyons Mail* (1917) starring H. B. Irving. Both of these films starred famous theatre actors and were based on plays, according to the *Kinematograph Monthly Film Record* (130).

Most Ideal films were prestigious films based on famous British novels or plays and starring household theatre names in the hope of legitimizing the British film. As such it seems very likely that Lorimer's theatre background was an important factor in Ideal's hiring of her, especially because the one confirmed writing credit for Lorimer, *Her Greatest Performance* (1916), was a star vehicle for another famous stage actress, Ellen Terry. *Her Greatest Performance* was an original screenplay cowritten especially for Terry by Enid Lorimer and Benedict James. Lorimer recalls that Terry made specific suggestions as "she would come into my little office and say, look dear, this is a very nice bit here but if you don't mind, do you think we could do it like this?" But Lorimer did not mind because "she knew her stage craft, that lady." *Her Greatest Performance* was a critical success, the trade press praising an excellent scenario although not always mentioning the writers by name (Terpstra 32).

We do not know of Lorimer's activities for Ideal or any other film company after 1916. But at some point during this period Lorimer became an advocate of the educational values of the cinema. Probably inspired by her work at Ideal, which prided itself on making highbrow, typically British films, Lorimer wanted to demonstrate that films and cinema-going were not necessarily a bad influence. In a letter to the *Bioscope*, written in September 1917 from the Writers' Club, Lorimer argues that "when intelligent and keenly critical audiences fill every part of the picture theatre, the higher-priced seats as well as the others, surely then the stream of public opinion will become so strong" that the press has to accept that the cinema is an art equal to theatre or literature. A second letter to the *Bioscope* in November 1917, written on behalf of Femina Films states that "we are supplying privately owned cinemas with films chosen for their suitability for our purpose," which is "to bring about the much-to-be-desired rapprochement between picture playhouse managers and the local clergy and educational authorities" thus "helping to break down lingering prejudices against the 'pictures'." According to company records at the National Archives, Femina Films was registered on May 25 1916, but stopped issuing stock by the beginning of 1918, not long after Enid Lorimer was registered as one of seven shareholders on December 28, 1917.

In a 1979 interview with *Filmnews Australia*, Lorimer fills in the details of her life dating from the end of World War I when her husband returned so traumatized that the marriage failed. In 1926 he committed suicide. Even before that, in 1923, Lorimer had emigrated to Australia to continue the work of the Theosophical Society, which she had joined in 1918. Looking back she explains

that “I went back into theatre almost as soon as the war ended,” which meant that the actress never had the chance to appear on the moving picture screen (11).

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Filmography

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Enid Lorimer as Scenarist

Her Greatest Performance, 1916.

Credit Report

If Lorimer's "On Stage!" interview is accurate, it is possible that she wrote the titles for *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1916). One erroneous writing credit for Lorimer is for *The House Opposite* (1917). In his record of the film, Denis Gifford gives the adaptation credit to both Enid Lorimer and Reuben Gillmer, possibly to rule out doubts. *The Bioscope* may simply have made a mistake when they referred to the script in their news columns as being "prepared for the film by Enid Lorimer" because on other occasions they mention only Reuben Gillmer as scenario writer. There is no other record of their having adapted the play together or of Lorimer working for Broadwest. Moreover, Gillmer leaves no room for doubt in his indignant reaction to *The Bioscope* mistake, and writing in, he claims that he wrote the script without assistance. Ironically, the subsequent review of *The House Opposite* in *The Bioscope* does not mention any writer at all. See: *The Bioscope* entries in bibliography from February and April 1917.

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<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-enid-lorimer/>>