

# **From Victorian Accomplishment to Modern Profession: Elocution Takes Judith Anderson, Sylvia Bremer and Dorothy Cumming to Hollywood, 1912-1918**

**Desley Deacon**

What to do with our Girls?

Make actresses of them.

*Advertisement*

*Walter Bentley College of Elocution and Dramatic Art*

*Sydney Morning Herald, 10 January 1914*

In July 1912, “Perth Prattle” remarked somewhat nastily in that city’s *Sunday Times* that “there’s hope for some of the members of Lionel’s ‘School of Acting’ yet.”<sup>1</sup> The “Lionel” the writer was referring to was a relative newcomer to Perth, Lionel Logue, not yet the celebrated curer of the King George VI’s stammer (Edgar). Logue had set up as an elocution teacher in Perth in 1906.<sup>2</sup> After touring North America and Europe to study the latest developments in his field in 1911, he established his School of Acting in a move that many teachers of elocution made about that time to emphasise their links to the stage [Fig. 1].<sup>3</sup>

“Perth Prattle”’s snide comment on the pretensions of Lionel Logue and all the little “Lionel Logues” was occasioned by the return of one of the city’s aspiring actresses, Enid Bennett. Bennett was the daughter of a well-known member of Perth society, Mrs Gillespie, widow of two successive headmasters of the prestigious Guildford Grammar School.<sup>4</sup> Two years earlier, Enid had caught the attention of a visiting American actress who was touring with the company of Australia’s favourite actor, Julius Knight.<sup>5</sup> Under this actress’s patronage, she had joined Knight’s company, and was now playing the part of Modesty in the play *Everywoman* before audiences in her hometown [Fig. 2].<sup>6</sup>

Ten years later, despite the scepticism of “Perth Prattle” about the efficacy of Lionel Logue and his ilk, Enid Bennett was in Hollywood, married to leading director Fred Niblo, and starring as Maid Marian in *Robin Hood* with Douglas Fairbanks [Fig. 3];<sup>7</sup> and soon after that, Lionel Logue was in London, establishing the reputation that brought the future king to him for treatment.<sup>8</sup> Elocution gave Lionel Logue a place among British royalty; and it gave Enid Bennett a pathway to movie stardom and Hollywood royalty.

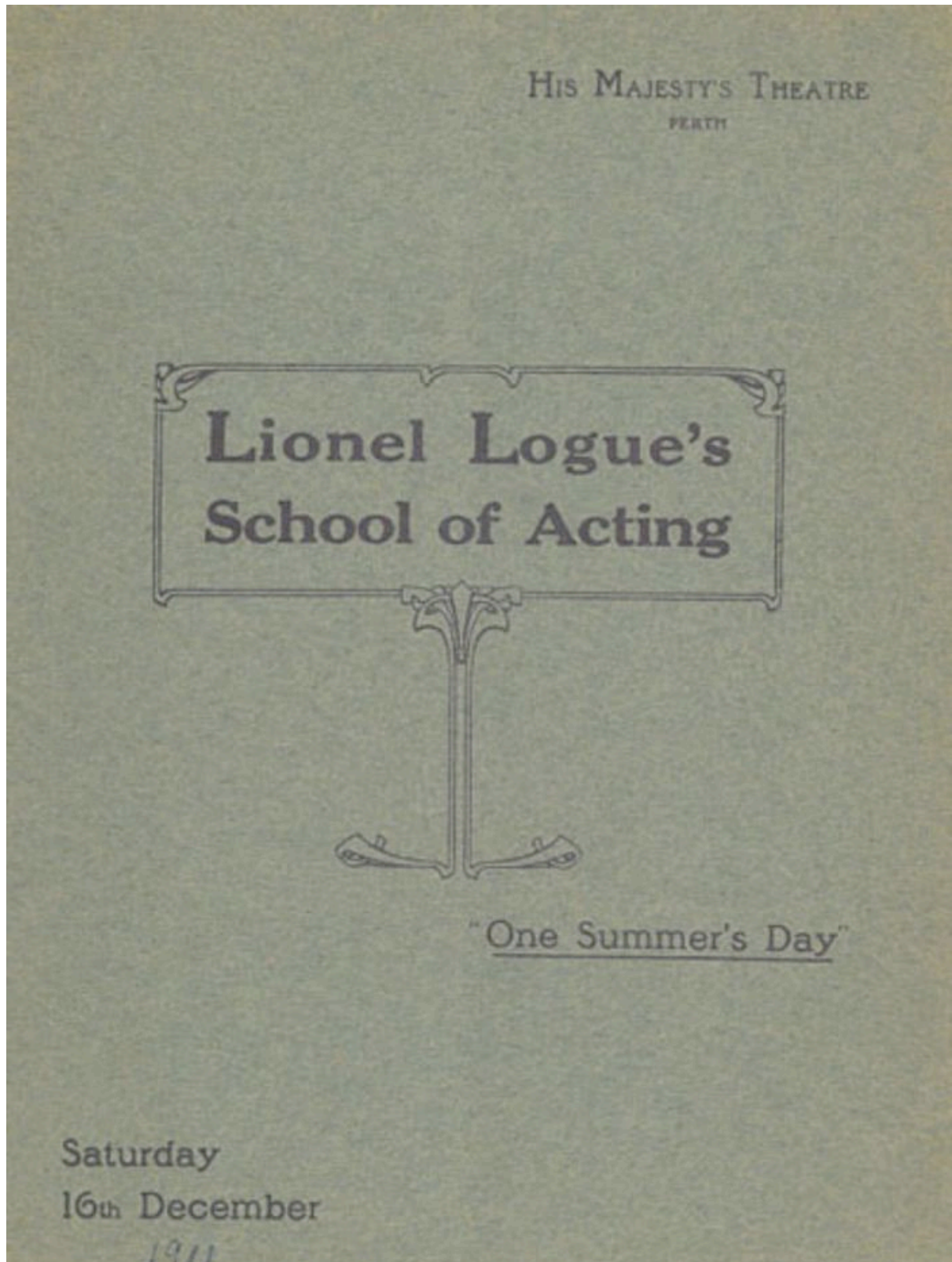


Figure 1 – Lionel Logue's School of Acting



Figure 2 – Enid Bennett in *Everywoman*, 1914



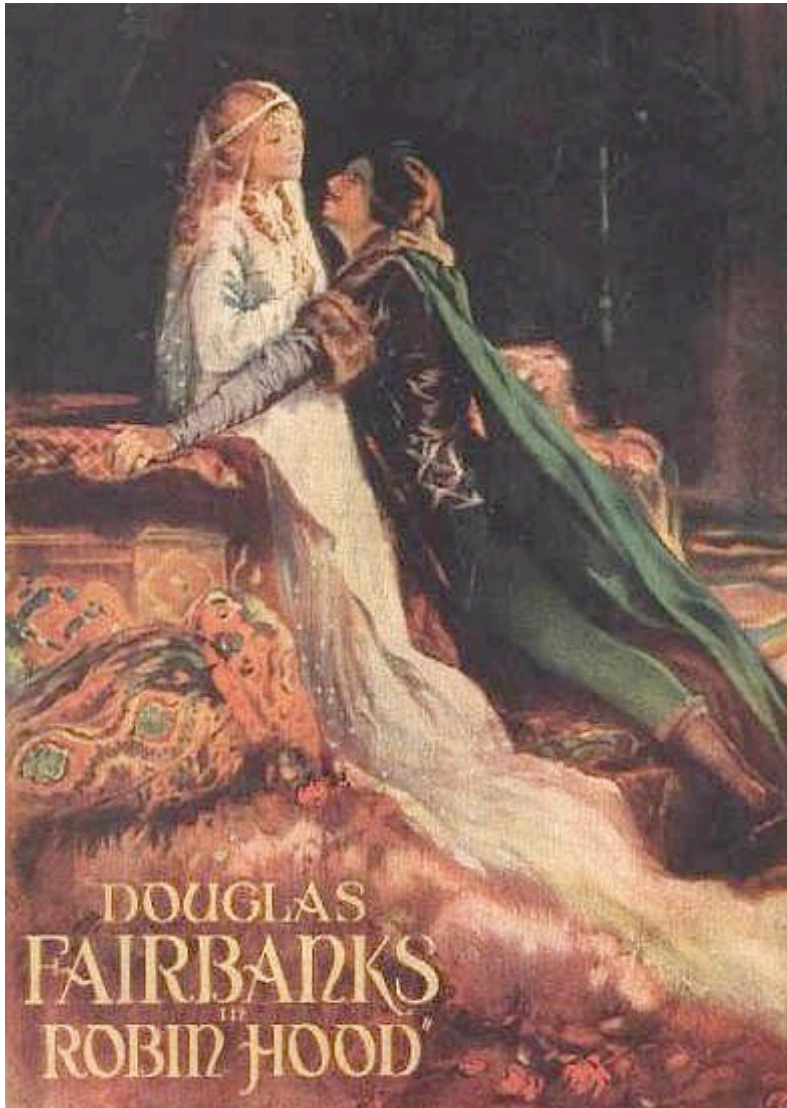


Figure 3 – Enid Bennett in *Robin Hood*, 1922

Elocution has had its day in the sun recently with the success of the movie, *The King's Speech* (2010). In Australia its cultural significance has been established definitively by Joy Damousi in *Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia 1849-1940*, in which she argues that speech was an important part of the “civilising” project of the British Empire. In particular, she demonstrates the centrality of elocution in forming the “civilised,” politically effective, man and the genteel woman.<sup>9</sup> Damousi does discuss the importance of elocution in training women such as Muriel Matters in political oratory. This article, however, investigates further the effect of elocution on women’s careers by focusing on an unexpected aspect of the so-called genteel art that links colonial girlhood – as in the case of Enid Bennett – with Hollywood. In the process it brings to light some unlikely links in the chain, such as the Unitarian Church and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union [WCTU]. I will use the example of the Adelaide-born actress, Dame Judith Anderson – star of *Rebecca* in the movies and *Medea* on the stage – to illustrate my argument; but I will demonstrate how Anderson was just one of a number of aspiring actresses, including Enid Bennett, Sylvia Bremer and Dorothy Cumming, who used elocution as a stepping stone to Hollywood.

Elocution – the art of speaking well – was, as Damousi points out, part of the education of almost every Australian colonial girl (Matthews). Newspapers from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century demonstrated that there were elocution teachers in many small towns, as well in as the major cities. Elocution was not just a way of asserting one’s middle-class, “civilised,” credentials. It was a central part of the culture that fed into the proliferation of home entertainment, from reading aloud, to recitations, to amateur theatricals.

From the 1880s these performances became public and competitive. Elocution for public performance was, up until that time, considered a male province, preparing them primarily for clerical, legal and political roles. During the 1880s and 1890s a number of developments brought women into this male sphere: these included the promotion of elocution in association with compulsory schooling (Southcott); the need for trained elocution teachers in state schools and technical colleges;<sup>10</sup> the opening up of Mechanics’ Institutes and Literary Societies to women;<sup>11</sup> and the establishment of a number of elocution competitions by the WCTU, literary societies, the Australian Natives Association and the eisteddfod movement, notably at South Street, Ballarat (Damousi 147-8, 151-2, 225-9).<sup>12</sup>

Essential to this development of elocution for girls and women from a private accomplishment to a public and competitive talent was the movement encouraging women to speak publicly. As in the United States, the Unitarian church led the way in welcoming women to its pulpits.<sup>13</sup> In 1873 Martha Turner was elected as minister to the Melbourne Unitarian congregation.<sup>14</sup> A correspondent in the Mount Gambier *Border Watch* growled in 1871 that “We lords of creation will have to go through a long course of education before we feel disposed to take our lessons from petticoated parsons and lecturers;” but other women, such as the South Australian writer, Catherine Helen Spence, took heart from Miss Turner’s success, and began to preach and give public lectures.<sup>15</sup>

A strong impetus to this movement for women to speak publicly was given by the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. The WCTU began its work in 1873 in the United States, but within two years it declared its aspirations to world influence with the establishment of the International Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Under the energetic and inspiring leadership of feminist Frances Willard from 1879, the movement developed a locally-based “Home Protection” political strategy that took on social issues including prostitution, women’s employment, world peace and female suffrage. Willard also encouraged the spread of WCTU chapters throughout the world. In 1883 the WCTU and the British women’s temperance organisation formed the World’s WCTU. From 1885 to 1886 the World’s WCTU missionary, American Mary Leavitt, helped establish branches in the Pacific and Asia, including in Australia and New Zealand (Tyrell).

Given its political aims, the WCTU developed, from the mid-1880s, a carefully thought-out strategy to train women as effective public speakers. Part of this was the establishment of regular elocution competitions for girls, sometimes known as Demorest Medal Contests, with silver, gold and diamond medals as the prizes. Like the WCTU itself, this was a worldwide movement, with well-defined rules and guidebooks with appropriate readings [Fig. 4]. A Google search reveals thousands of these competitions throughout the world, in small towns and large; and the winning of these competitions as part of the ladder of success of public women, from officials of local organisations to well-known actresses and professional women.

As early as October 1887 the *Horsham Times* was reporting on the admirable elocution and memory of the youthful Miss Little at the first public meeting of the local WCTU.<sup>16</sup> From

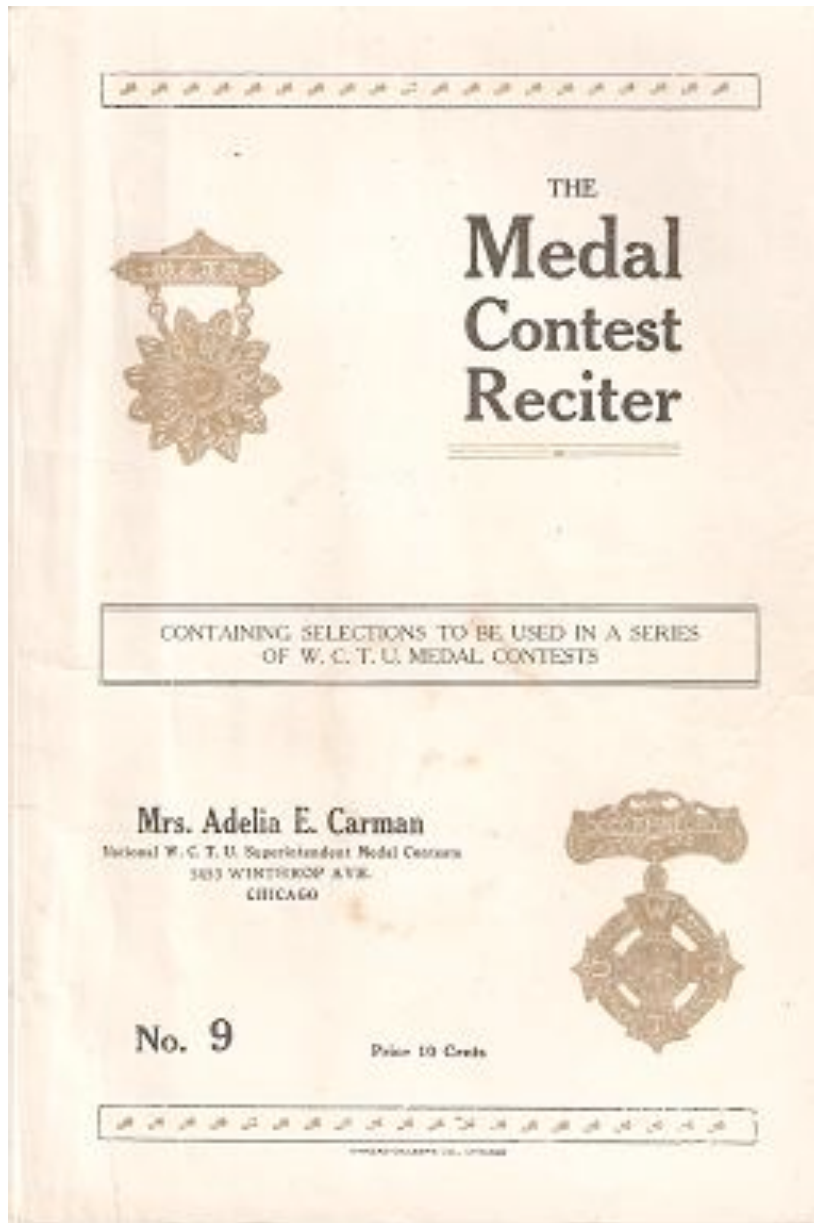


Figure 4 – *The Medal Contest Reciter*. National W.C.T.U. Publishing House.

about 1900, regular WCTU medal contests were held throughout Australia, providing encouragement to girls to take to the public platform and to speak clearly and persuasively. Similar encouragement was given by church-based temperance organisations, such as the Band of Hope, which flourished in the mid to late nineteenth century to provide young people with alternative activities to those of the saloon and the pub. The prominent suffrage campaigner, Muriel Matters, began her career as a 13-year-old performer for the Unley Wesleyan Band of Hope in her hometown of Adelaide.<sup>17</sup>

Churches and charities found these performances a good way of making money, and talented girls (and boys) were sought after for amateur fund-raising events that often took the form of competitions. By the end of the nineteenth century, the public and competitive nature of

elocution was institutionalised in such regular, nationwide contests as the South Street Eisteddfod at Ballarat and the annual Australian Natives Association competitions – and teachers of elocution prided themselves on the number of prizes their pupils won. Elocution was no longer just a private accomplishment for girls and young women. Instead, it legitimated public performance and encouraged ambition; and in the process, it inculcated discipline and taught colonial girls marketable skills. Young women became elocution teachers in their turn; they found jobs in technical schools; they became public performers and lecturers; and they went on the stage, and, as the film industry developed, they aspired, like Enid Bennett, to go into the movies.

From the early years of the twentieth century we see more and more elocution teachers advertising themselves, like Lionel Logue in 1911, as directors of schools of acting; *The Theatre* magazine began running stories about elocution teachers and prize winners; and we see a movement from recruitment for the stage from family dynasties to elocution schools that funneled their best, mostly middle-class girls, into the leading theatre companies, especially the theatrical giant, J C Williamson, and, for some of these girls, to Hollywood.<sup>18</sup> Francee Anderson, Sylvia Bremer and Dorothy Cumming received their training, and their start in their profession, at Sydney's three major schools of elocution, Lawrence Campbell's School of Public Speaking and Dramatic Art, Walter Bentley's College of Elocution and Dramatic Art, and the Ancelon-Chapman College of Dramatic Art.

Lawrence Campbell began teaching in Sydney in 1894.<sup>19</sup> Born in England, he had studied elocution and dramatic art at the Polytechnic Hall in London. When his career on the stage was cut short by illness he joined relatives in Devonport, Tasmania, where he began teaching elocution (Campbell).<sup>20</sup> Moving to Sydney, he quickly became a major force in the development of the profession and in the city's cultural life. His recitals and those of his pupils were regular events on the cultural calendar, and he was much sought after for many years as adjudicator at the South Street and other competitions. Elected a member of the National Association of Elocutionists of America in 1902, he founded the Australasian Elocutionary Association two years later and made strenuous attempts to establish a national school of elocution.<sup>21</sup>

Scottish-born Walter Bentley established his College of Elocution and Dramatic Art in 1910, when he retired from the stage. A protégé of the great Henry Irving, he had made his Australian debut under George Coppin in the late 1880s, and was beloved as a brilliant Shakespearean actor (Djubal). With former associate, the American actor Douglas Ancelon, and local teacher of elocution, Stella Chapman, as principals, Bentley trained his students for a public performance every month. With his long experience of the Australian stage and as founding Secretary, and later President, of the Australian Actors' Association, he was well placed to help his students gain an entrée to the professional stage.

After only a year, Douglas Ancelon and Stella Chapman married and set up in opposition to Bentley. Taking a number of students with them, their Ancelon-Chapman College of Dramatic Art established the same system of monthly performances inaugurated by their former associate. With two rival colleges advertising themselves as preparing their students for the stage, Lawrence Campbell changed the name of his school to the Lawrence Campbell School of Public Speaking and Dramatic Art.<sup>22</sup>

As we know, Australians were involved in movies from the beginning. The Tait brothers, who later took over J C Williamson, are credited with the world's first full-length feature film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906). By 1911 there were a number of competing companies: amongst others, Raymond Longford was directing films starring Lottie Lyell for Spencer's Pictures (Wasson 171-2); and the beautiful Louise Carbasse was starring in films made by Gaston Mervale's Australian Life Biograph Company (Bertrand; Delamoire "Louise Lovely"; Kelly 118). But when the combines Union Theatres Ltd and Australasian Films Ltd were set up in 1913, they had no interest in local production. Early in 1915, in a last ditch attempt to forestall American films being made of their plays, Williamson's bought the Lincoln-Cass studio in Melbourne and produced movies of current hits *Get-Rich-Quick* and *Officer 666* under the direction of visiting American actor, Fred Niblo, and starring Enid Bennett. After Niblo and Bennett left Australia later that year, Williamson's produced six other films before the film unit was closed down in 1920 (Pike and Cooper; Marsden).

But from 1913, Antipodean actors began finding their way to the new movie capital of Hollywood.<sup>23</sup> Mrs Henry Bracy [Clara Thompson], the wife of the head of JCW's Opera Company, was one of the first, joining D W Griffith's pioneering company in 1913 (Deacon "Cosmopolitans"). New Zealanders Elsie Jane Wilson and her husband Rupert Julian joined Universal that same year, after appearing for some time on the Australian stage<sup>24</sup>, and Louise Carbasse, renamed Louise Lovely, became one of Universal's stars the following year (Delamoire "Louise Lovely").

Enid Bennett was the first of a new breed of middle-class Australian girls whose families had no connections with the theatre who made their way on to the stage and on to Hollywood when she was hired by producer Thomas Ince for his Triangle Film Corporation in 1916 (Deacon "Cosmopolitans").<sup>25</sup> I first became aware of these young women when I began researching the life and career of the Adelaide-born actress Dame Judith Anderson. Born in 1897, Anderson – then known as Francee – left for the United States, and, she hoped, a Hollywood career, in 1918, with letters of introduction to leading producer, Cecil B de Mille. De Mille decided she did not have a future in movies – her striking angular looks were very different from the current Mary Pickford – or Enid Bennett – style, and she went on to make her mark as an elegant sophisticate in the 1920s on Broadway, where she was one of America's leading actresses until the 1950s (Deacon "Becoming Cosmopolitan"; "A Cosmopolitan at Home").<sup>26</sup> She did become a major Hollywood star, however, with her role as Mrs Danvers, the spooky housekeeper in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* in 1940 [Fig. 5].<sup>27</sup> She had much pleasure in reminding de Mille of his earlier rejection of her when she appeared as Memnet in his 1956 extravaganza, *The Ten Commandments* ("Noted Stage Star"; "Judith Anderson").<sup>28</sup>

Judith Anderson's early career in Australia illustrates very well the role of elocution on the road to stardom.<sup>29</sup> She was born Frances Margaret Anderson to a wealthy mine investor and his wife, the former Jessie Saltmarsh, who came from a family of talented amateur performers. Anderson's father gambled away his fortune and left the family when she was about five years old. Her mother then supported the family by running a grocery store with the help of her four children. Fanny, as she was called, had, from an early age, the beautiful throaty voice that became her signature, and she shone in the home entertainments of the time. She began singing and reciting at church, charity, and WCTU fundraisers, and at the age of eight was taken on by young elocution teacher, Mabel Best. Best was herself a recent pupil of Adelaide teacher, Edward Reeves, who had also taught Lionel Logue.





Figure 5 – Judith Anderson as Mrs Danvers in *Rebecca*, 1940.

Under Mabel Best's tuition, Fanny went to the South Street Eisteddfod in Ballarat in 1909, when she was 12 years old, and won a medal for her performance, with a fellow pupil, of the duet "Where are you going, my pretty maid?" Three years later, she scooped the pool with the silver, gold and diamond medals of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union [Fig. 6].

Thus credentialed, she and her mother and sister set off to Sydney, where she took further lessons from Lawrence Campbell. After appearing to good notices in the regular public performances of Campbell's students, she was taken on, in 1915, this time under the name of Francee Anderson – by the J C Williamson company led by Julius Knight – the same Julius Knight who had nurtured Enid Bennett's talents [Fig. 7]. After touring in *ingenue* roles with Knight and then with a Tait company, she set off to try her luck in Hollywood at the beginning of 1918, accompanied by her mother [Fig. 8].

When I began researching Anderson's career, I was amazed that she had made this ambitious leap across the Pacific when she was barely established in her own country. But I found that she was following a well-worn path established by previous Williamson actors who had also come up through the ranks of amateur elocution competitions and theatricals. Enid Bennett was one of the first to go, departing in 1915, with American comedian Fred Niblo and his wife Josephine Cohen, with whom she had been appearing in a Williamson company ("Perth Prattle" 25). She immediately got work in a major theatrical company, and while on tour on the West Coast, she met the wife of movie producer Thomas Ince in Los Angeles. Thomas Ince liked her delicate looks, and, declaring her the greatest find since Mary Pickford, signed



Figure 6 – Fanny Anderson wins the WCTU’s Diamond Medal, 1912. *The Mail* (Adelaide), 14 September, 1912, p. 5.

her up for the Triangle Film Corporation he had recently formed with Mack Sennett and D W Griffith.<sup>30</sup> By 1917 she was advertised as the first screen artist from the Antipodes to reach star class in the film *Princess of the Dark*, in which she starred with “the great lover,” Jack Gilbert, famous ten years later for his role as Garbo’s lover in *The Flesh and the Devil*.<sup>31</sup>

Enid Bennett was joined that year at Triangle by Sylvia Bremer. Bremer came from an illustrious British-Australian naval family.<sup>32</sup> Her socially prominent family seemed to welcome independence and competition in its daughters. Her cousin Poppy, daughter of Lieutenant-Commander Gordon Bremer, was a well-known competitive tennis player and later a pianist in the orchestra that accompanied the movies at the Sydney Lyceum Theatre.<sup>33</sup> Familiar with theatrical circles in Sydney, her mother took her to the theatrical agency, Footlights, in 1910, when she was thirteen years old. The agency sent her in turn to Walter Bentley for training.<sup>34</sup> She moved with Douglas Ancelon and Stella Chapman when they established their independent College of Dramatic Art the following year. By 1912 she was performing as Juliet in the Potion Scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in Ancelon-Chapman and other public entertainments<sup>35</sup> and winning all the prizes for girls’ recitation under 18 at the Commonwealth Eisteddfod.<sup>36</sup> Already attracting notice in the *Theatre* for her beauty and talent, she was awarded a special certificate of merit for her Shakespearean recitation at the Lismore Music Festival, where the judge commented that he had heard this recitation given



Figure 7 – Francee Anderson. A Lawrence Campbell Student who is now with the Julius Knight Company. *Theatre*, 1 September 1915, p. 36. State Library of NSW.



Figure 8 – Francee Anderson, 1918





Figure 9 – Sylvia Bremer, ca. 1912, by May Moore. State Library of New South Wales

better only once before – at the Ballarat Eisteddfod – where, he pointed out, “the elocutional competitions were big items, and the winners often went straight from them to the stage.” “Miss Bremer,” he added, “showed promise of going the same way-if she liked” [Fig. 9].<sup>37</sup>

Within three months she had, indeed, been engaged by J C Williamson for their *Within the Law* company with the American leading lady, Muriel Starr. As Douglas Ancelonn and Stella Chapman proudly announced on 20 December 1913, Miss Sylvia Bremer sailed that day for New Zealand with the company.<sup>38</sup> On the company’s return to Sydney in 1914, she appeared to excellent reviews with Enid Bennett in *The Argyle Case*. “Miss Sylvia Bremer made a success in her first important role in her native city,” the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic wrote. “Her voice is soft and small, but very clear, her presence graceful, and her methods subtle.”<sup>39</sup> The following year she had the break that every young actor dreams of: the star of *Bought and Paid For*, Muriel Starr, was suddenly taken ill, and Bremer took her part with great success for several weeks.<sup>40</sup> “The substitute actress,” the *West Australian* reported, “who is said to be very good looking, is the product of a dramatic school in Sydney.”<sup>41</sup>

Sometime during this period, Sylvia Bremer married her producer, E W Morrison.<sup>42</sup> Together they had been plotting to try their luck in the US since early 1915, but Bremer's opportunity to star in *Bought and Paid For* delayed their departure.<sup>43</sup> When they finally arrived in the US late in 1916, Bremer, like Bennett, was immediately engaged in a major stage production.<sup>44</sup> She left soon after, however, to join Thomas Ince at Triangle.<sup>45</sup> Her first movie, *The Pinch Hitter*, co-starring Charles Ray, was released at the end of April 1917 [Fig. 10].<sup>46</sup> Her husband returned to Australia without her.<sup>47</sup>

Ince predicted a future for Sylvia Bremer equally brilliant to that of his first Australian acquisition, Enid Bennett; and the initial assessment was, as the *Lone Hand* put it, that she "surpassed Bennett as actress by a long way." But Bremer never achieved the success of her fellow-countrywoman.<sup>48</sup> When Ince sold his share in Triangle in 1918, she lost her promoter.

She made several movies for independent producer, J Stuart Blackton (who changed the spelling of her name to "Bremer"). Of the 48 movies she made between 1917 and 1936, her best-known is *The Girl of the Golden West* (1923). To the Australian public during the late teens and early twenties, she was, like Enid Bennett, an example of someone who had "made it." In her mother's hometown of Lismore, where Sylvia had enthralled them with her recitations twenty years before, the local newspaper reported in 1922 that "The land of the Stars and Stripes appeals to her and she loves the strenuous life lived by the American citizeness." "She is one of the screen stars in the movie world of the United States, and in gracefulness and beauty is a good advertisement for this country," they wrote. "She often yearns for Australian sunshine and our beaches, but she has 'won out' and is booked ahead for years."<sup>49</sup> The market for her sort of ethereal beauty was waning, however. When she married for the second time at the end of 1924, she announced her retirement from motion pictures. Although the marriage only lasted two years, she made very few movies from that time.<sup>50</sup> She died in 1943 at the age of forty-six [Fig. 11].<sup>51</sup>

A third Australian actress to move from elocution classes to J C Williamson's to Hollywood in this period was Dorothy Cumming. Like Sylvia Bremer, Cumming came from a well-to-do and socially prominent family. She was born in Burrowa [now Boorowa], New South Wales, in 1894, one of three daughters of an officer of the Lands Department who was also what an American biographer called a "sheep rancher" on Narrangullen Station, outside Yass.<sup>52</sup> Sheep ranching (and the family's ties to influential politicians) proved lucrative. In 1900, the family was living in "Hurstville," described as "the finest city residence in Goulburn," the pleasant nearby rural centre, and Dorothy, then aged six, was beginning her platform career with a "pleasing rendering" of "Pretty White Lillies" at a public entertainment.<sup>53</sup> Her father sold their handsome country home in 1904, when Dorothy was ten years old, and "Narrangullen" was sold two years later.<sup>54</sup> With four children aged 12 to 20 to launch, the family moved to Sydney, where they settled in the fashionable suburb of Woollahra.<sup>55</sup>

While attending a prestigious girls' school, Dorothy joined Lawrence Campbell's elocution classes.<sup>56</sup> At 13 [1907] she was playing in the public entertainments put on by his junior pupils.<sup>57</sup> When Walter Bentley opened his school in 1910, she sought additional training for the stage from the old master.<sup>58</sup> The tall, willowy Cumming made her debut in 1911 as Beauty in J C Williamson's production of *Everywoman*, with Enid Bennett as Modesty and visiting Australian/American star Hilda Spong as Everywoman [Fig. 12].<sup>59</sup> During the company's Australian tour, the Perth *Sunday Times* noted that "Miss Cumming is a clever girl, and her future career will be watched with interest."<sup>60</sup> By 1913 she was part of



Figure 10 – Poster for *The Pinch Hitter*, 1917.





Figure 11 – Sylvia Bremer, 1920s.



Williamsons' premier company, led by Julius Knight, and when Francee Anderson joined the company in 1915, Dorothy Cumming had for some time been playing one of the leading roles, the Empress Marie Louise, in the Napoleonic drama, *A Royal Divorce*.<sup>61</sup>

In 1915 Cumming also starred in the J C Williamson movie, *Within Our Gates; or Deeds That Won Gallipoli*, directed by her fellow actor, Frank Harvey, and featuring actors from Williamson's stable.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps her ambition was stirred by this experience: soon after, she announced that she was leaving for the US.<sup>63</sup> Like Bremer, however, an opportunity – this time for a leading role with Julius Knight in *The Three Musketeers*, *The Lady of Lyons*, and *The Christian* – came up, and she accepted it.<sup>64</sup> This did not turn out well: some critics felt she not ready for leading roles, and her contract was not renewed.<sup>65</sup> During the first half of 1916 she took a position as leading lady in the less prestigious Brandon-Cremer Dramatic Company.<sup>66</sup> When in June that year the *Adelaide Mail* announced that “Miss Dorothy Cumming left for Sydney by the express this afternoon, where she has accepted the position of leading lady with Julius Knight's dramatic company,” she was once more disappointed when the current star, Lizette Parkes, was re-engaged.<sup>67</sup>

Always resolute, Cumming realised her career was moving slowly in Australia, and set off for North America. Writing confidently from the Algonquin in New York that December, she told the *Theatre* that she had been offered a Broadway role but had accepted instead a movie contract to play the Queen in Famous Players' *Snow White*.<sup>68</sup> Her two sisters, Rose and Eileen, quickly followed her to New York, where the three striking siblings established themselves among the artistic elite. Rose Cumming became, by the early 1920s, one of that city's most sought-after decorators and Eileen a high-powered advertising executive, first at *Vogue*, then at Saks Fifth Avenue.<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile Dorothy no doubt had great satisfaction in returning to Australia, less than a year after her departure, as leading lady in the company touring with the veteran actor Cyril Maude.<sup>70</sup> At the same time her movie, *Snow White*, was being screened locally.<sup>71</sup> *The Lone Hand* pictured her “chatter[ing] in her bright wholly Australian way despite the USA stamp on her beautiful clothes and much of her personality.”<sup>72</sup> At a matinee in aid of the Amelioration Fund for Wounded Soldiers, she joined Nellie Melba and Cyril Maude on the platform, “[bringing] the house nearly close to tears” with her recitation.<sup>73</sup>

Cumming returned to the US with the company, touring extensively through the US and Canada before closing in Chicago in September 1918. A former member of the cast reported that Cumming, who had received splendid notices in San Francisco, had returned to Los Angeles for a picture engagement.<sup>74</sup> However, she appeared on Broadway soon after in David Belasco's *Tiger! Tiger!* with former Adelaide actor O P Heggie until April 1919.<sup>75</sup>

Despite her success on Broadway, Dorothy Cumming concentrated, from 1920 to 1930, on her career as a character actress in the movies. Described as a “soft, quiet-voiced patrician” and “English to her finger-tips,”<sup>76</sup> Cumming's tall, handsome figure made her ideal for athletic roles, such as Jessica Ramsey in *Don't Tell Everything* (1921), dignified portrayals, such as Anita Page's mother in *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928) and Queen Maria Carolina in *The Divine Lady* (1929), and a foil for delicate heroines such as Mae Murray in *Idols of Clay* (1920) and Lillian Gish in *The Wind* (1928). Cecil B de Mille considered hers the perfect face for Mary, mother of Christ, in *The King of Kings* in 1927 [Fig. 13].<sup>77</sup> (Interestingly, Judith Anderson played the same role in the Broadway play, *Family Portrait*, in 1939, and de Mille had plans, which did not come to fruition, to make it into a movie starring Anderson.)<sup>78</sup>



MISS DOROTHY CUMMINGS,

Who will appear as "Beauty" in "Everywoman," the Big Dramatic Attraction to be presented here by J. C. Williamson, Ltd., on Monday, July 29.

Figure 12 - Dorothy Cumming in *Everywoman*, 1912. *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 16 July 1912, p. 25.

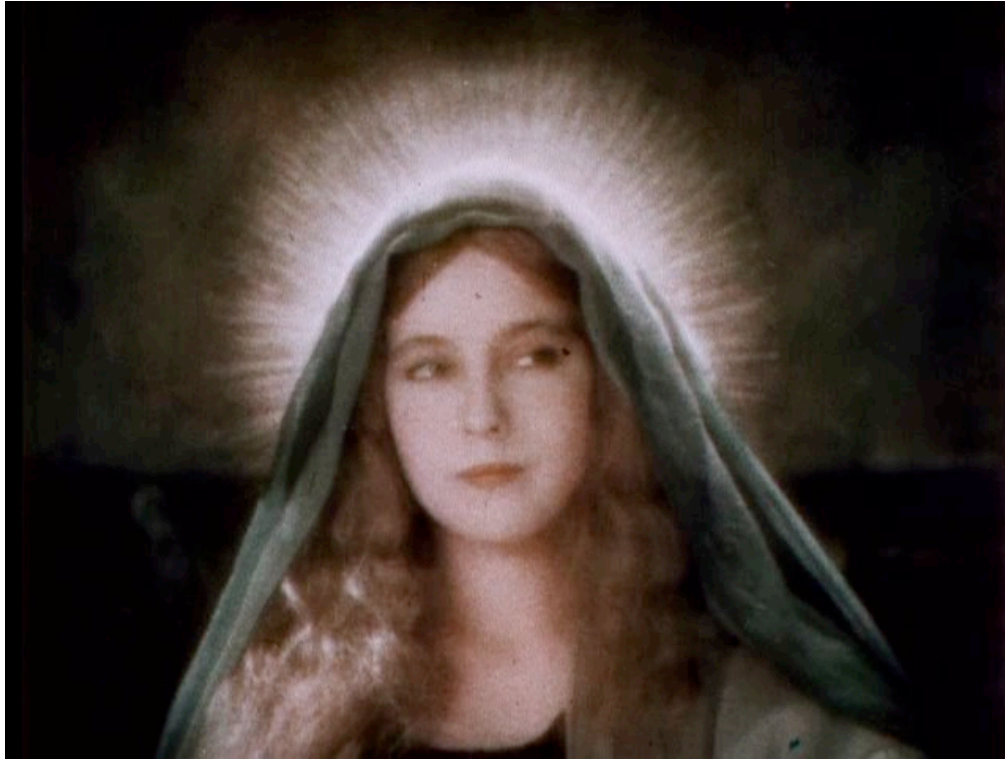


Figure 13 – Dorothy Cumming as Mary in *King of Kings*, 1927.

Dorothy Cumming's first marriage, to stage director Frank Elliott Dakin, was shortlived, and their two sons took her maiden name after her divorce (Simpson). She married British artist Allan McNab in 1932, after her movie career ended, and they lived mostly in England until the outbreak of war.<sup>79</sup> On her return to New York in 1939, her play, *The Woman Brown*, was produced on Broadway, but was roasted by critics and lasted only one week.<sup>80</sup> After her marriage to McNab ended, she moved in the mid-fifties to Montego Bay, Jamaica, where she made her name once again as a dress designer whose brilliant fabrics and simple designs clothed the international jet set, from Princess Margaret to the New York elite.<sup>81</sup> She died in December 1983, following *Rose* (1968) and *Eileen* (1982).<sup>82</sup> Eileen's grand-daughter and Rose and Dorothy's grand-niece, Sarah Cumming Cecil, continues the family design tradition.<sup>83</sup>

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At the end of 1913, the Sydney Girls' Own Realm Guild held one of their regular "What to Do with Our Girls?" exhibitions in the Town Hall, complete with David Jones model bungalow and a model dairy, with a demonstrator dressed in lavender and white. A very modern response came from Walter Bentley in the January 1914 advertisement for his College of Elocution and Dramatic Art. "What to Do with Our Girls?" he asked. His answer was, "Make actress of them."<sup>84</sup> He and his fellow elocution teachers continued to hammer that message throughout the teens, pointing to the success of Francee Anderson, Sylvia Bremer, Dorothy Cumming and other young women they had taught. As they were quick to point out, the careers of their former pupils demonstrated that that most Victorian of

accomplishments – elocution – had become, in the early twentieth century, a stepping stone to that most modern of occupations for women – the movie actress.

From the vantage point of a century later, it can be argued that elocution did, indeed, provide training, discipline, skills, self-confidence, and legitimation for middle-class Australian girls to aspire to independence and worldly success in a way that few other qualifications offered at that time; and, with its strong connections to American women’s “get-up-and-go,” it fostered the expansive mind map to allow their Australian counterparts to follow their aspirations to their heights wherever in the world they may take them – Sydney, New York, Los Angeles, Montego Bay.<sup>85</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Sunday Times* [ST], 14 July 1912: 29.

<sup>2</sup> *West Australian* [WA], 25 April 1906: 1.

<sup>3</sup> WA 15 August 1911: 6; 12 September 1911: 6; ST 20 August 1911: 20.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett was born in 1893 in York, Western Australia, where her father was headmaster of the York Grammar School. The family moved in 1896 to Guildford, Perth, where Frank Bennett was drowned in 1898. The following year Nellie Bennett married his successor, A D Gillespie, who died three years later. ST 6 May 1917; 2:5; *Albany Advertiser* 6 October 1898: 3; WA 25 October 1898: 4; 21 December 1899: 2; 31 October 1903: 6; Kemp and Kemp.

<sup>5</sup> WA 4 July 1910: 6; *Daily News* (Perth) [DN] 3 August 1910: 4; 16 September 1910: 4; ST, 4; December 1910: 26; 26 February 1911: 26.

<sup>6</sup> DN 6 November 1911: 4; WA 6 July 1912: 9; 17 July 1912: 9; 19 July 1912: 8; ST 28 July 1912: 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Robin Hood* (1922), International Movie Data Base [IMDB]; *New York Times* [NYT] 31 Oct 1922: 12. For Niblo see *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol 38, 1953: 264-5; for Niblo in Australia see Deacon, “Cosmopolitans at Home.” For photo together see NYT 17 Jan 1926: RP4.

<sup>8</sup> WA 31 January 1924: 8; ST 7 October 1929: 1.

<sup>9</sup> See also Damousi and Deacon; Atkinson.

<sup>10</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* [SMH] 1 October 1885: 12; 30 March 1886: 7; *Bendigo Advertiser* 14 July 1886: 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Advertiser* (Adelaide) 26 October 1895: 6.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.royalsouthstreet.com.au/history>

<sup>13</sup> For US see *Queenslander* 27 January 1872: 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Argus* 21 July 1873: 6; 24 November 1873: 4; Serle.

<sup>15</sup> *South Australian Register* 25 November 1875: 5. Miss Spence lectured on this occasion under the Unitarian Young Men’s Society. See Miss C H Spence, “The Woman Speaker. Reminiscences and Comparisons.” *Register* (Adelaide) 11 December 1909: 15; Eade [Magarey].

<sup>16</sup> *Horsham Times* 18 October 1887: 3.



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- <sup>17</sup> *Advertiser* (Adelaide) 15 February 1890: 6. See Gosse.
- <sup>18</sup> Even Nancye Stewart, daughter of “Australia’s sweetheart” Nellie Stewart and theatrical entrepreneur George Musgrove, trained at Walter Bentley’s School. See SMH 11 October 1913: 24.
- <sup>19</sup> See advertisement, SMH 5 May 1894: 2.
- <sup>20</sup> *Brisbane Courier* 9 April 1928: 15; obituary, SMH 23 August 1941: 14.
- <sup>21</sup> SMH 21 November 1902: 6; 14 April 1904: 8; *Argus* 11 October 1902: 16; *Examiner* (Launceston) 27 October 1903: 7.
- <sup>22</sup> SMH 3 June 1912: 7.
- <sup>23</sup> *Theatre* 1 February 1915: 28-30; 1 September 1915: 34-6. For accounts of this movement see Macdonald and Delamoir “The First ‘gum leaf mafia’.”
- <sup>24</sup> See *Theatre* 1 December 1914:26-27; 1 December 1916:48; Slide; Garrett Cooper.
- <sup>25</sup> *Theatre* 1 September 1916:34. Louise Carbasse and Elsie Wilson had been child actors.
- <sup>26</sup> The most extensive discussion of Anderson’s US stage career is by Fiona Gregory. Anderson is best known for *Medea* (Euripides) adapted by Robinson Jeffers, in which she appeared on Broadway from 20 October 1947 to 15 May 1948 and on tour from 6 September 1948 to 21 May 1949. She also played *Medea* on the initial tour of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in 1955. Costelloe spoke of Anderson’s performance in 1949 in Washington, DC, as “the greatest performance of a great artist in her thus-far greatest role” (272-3). She was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1960 for services to the performing arts.
- <sup>27</sup> *Rebecca* (1940) produced by David O Selznick. There is a large literature on Anderson’s role as Mrs Danvers. See Deacon, “Celebrity Sexuality.”
- <sup>28</sup> *Washington Post* 21 April 21 1942: 18.
- <sup>29</sup> For greater detail see Desley Deacon, “Outlaw Fan.”
- <sup>30</sup> *Theatre* 1 October 1915: 36-38; 1 November 1915:10-14; 1 May 1916:14; 1 September 1916: 34; 1 December 1916:29; ST 28 January 1917: 16.
- <sup>31</sup> See cover, *Photoplay Mirror*, n.d.; *Theatre* 1 February 1917: 20-21.
- <sup>32</sup> Bremer was born in Double Bay, Sydney, in 1897 to Frederick Glasse Bremer and Jessie B Platt.
- <sup>33</sup> For social prominence see many, including SMH 1 September 1900: 7; 12 April 1913: 6; *Town and Country Journal* [TCJ] 12 October 1901: 44; for tennis TCJ, 23 October 1897: 39; *Register (Adelaide)* 29 September 1903: 5; *Evening Post* [NZ], 21 July 1906: 14; SMH, 25 March 1912: 12; 17 March 1913: 10; 10 September 1913: 16; for Lyceum, DN 11 July 1917: 3.
- <sup>34</sup> SMH 6 June 1914: 3.
- <sup>35</sup> SMH 1 May 1912: 20; 8 July 1912: 3; 14 September 1912: 3; 21 September 1912: 20; 4 April 1913: 12; 29 November 1913: 24.
- <sup>36</sup> SMH, 31 October 1912: 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Theatre* 2 December 1912: 37; 1 July 1913: 37; *Clarence and Richmond Examiner* [CRE], 11 September 1913: 4; *Brisbane Courier* 10 September 1913: 6.

<sup>38</sup> SMH 20 December 1913: 22.

<sup>39</sup> SMH 11 May 1914: 4.

<sup>40</sup> SMH 22 March 1915: 4; 23 March 1915: 12; 12 April 1915: 2; *Mail* (Adelaide) 25 December 1915; 14 September 1918: 8.

<sup>41</sup> WA 2 April 1915: 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Theatre* 1 March 1917: 26. See Ancestry.com for marriage Sylvia P Bremer and Willett Morrison.

<sup>43</sup> *Northern Star* (Lismore) 2 March 1915: 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Christian Science Monitor* 2 Jan 1917: 10; *Theatre* 1 March 1917: 26; *Cairns Post* 17 October 1917: 8.

<sup>45</sup> SMH 22 February 1917: 8; *Los Angeles Times* [LAT] 22 Apr 1917: VI8; *Santa Cruz Daily Surf* 7 April 1917: 8; WA, 14 April 1917: 8; *Lone Hand* July 1917: 383; DN 11 July 1917: 3; SMH 23 May 1935 Women's Supplement: 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Lone Hand* August 1917: 435; *Cairns Post* 17 October 1917: 8.

<sup>47</sup> SMH 22 February 1917: 8.

<sup>48</sup> *Lone Hand* August 1917:438; *Mail* (Adelaide) 7 July 1917: 4. See *Theatre* 1 November 1917: 9 for photo of E J Tait with Bennett and Bremer in Los Angeles in August 1917.

<sup>49</sup> *Northern Star* (Lismore) 11 January 1922: 7.

<sup>50</sup> LAT 2 November 1924: 7; *Townsville Daily Bulletin* 14 January 1925: 6; LAT 20 April 1926: A10; 18 August 1928: A2.

<sup>51</sup> LAT 10 June 1943: 2.

<sup>52</sup> Her father, Victor Albert Queensland Cumming (1859-1927) was the son of Frederick Cumming and Agnes Jane Farnell. For his career see SMH 23 March 1883: 3; 21 February 1885: 11; 13 April 1904: 15; TCJ 23 May 1896: 41; SMH 19 February 1927: 10. Her mother, Sarah Theresa (1859-1929) was the daughter of Thomas Fennell and Rose Clare. She married Thomas Frederick Hughes in 1876 and had a son, Thomas Frederick Hughes (1878-1953). According to her later account, Hughes was "a brute" whom she left while pregnant with her daughter Margery. In 1883 she married Victor Cumming. Rose Stuart Cumming was born in 1884; Victor in 1887; Eileen G in 1890; and Dorothy in 1894. See *Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser* (NSW), 19 December 1876: 1; SMH 11 August 1953: 18; 14 May 1887: 1; 14 April 1894: 1. For family memories and photographs of Sarah Fennell, Victor Cumming, and "Hurstville" see Simpson 38-42. For "sheep rancher" see Wikipedia.

<sup>53</sup> SMH 13 April 1904: 15; *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* 8 May 1900: 4.

<sup>54</sup> SMH 13 April 1904: 15; TCJ 12 September 1906: 8. For the later history of the property see Rutledge; Savage.

<sup>55</sup> A photo in Simpson places Rose [aged 21] in Sydney in 1905; SMH 15 May 1905: 11 places Eileen [aged 15] at St John's parochial school, Darlinghurst. *Sydney and New South Wales, Sands Street Index, 1861-1930* places them in Woollahra in 1910.

<sup>56</sup> “Perth Prattle,” ST, 22 September 1912 2:13 says that she attended the Church of England Girls Grammar School for Girls in Sydney; but a 1920 account (*Who's Who on the Screen*) places her at the progressive Ascham School.

<sup>57</sup> SMH 24 September 1907: 5.

<sup>58</sup> SMH 24 February 1912: 21.

<sup>59</sup> *Advertiser* (Adelaide) 16 December 1911: 5; SMH 19 February 1912: 4. English-born Hilda Spong (1875-1955) came to Australia in 1889 with her father, Walter Brookes Spong, a scene painter for the Brough and Boucicault Comedy Company. She made her debut with the company in 1891. In 1896 she went to London and after 1898, when she took her hit *Trelawny of the “Wells”* to New York, she commuted between the US and England, appearing on stage and in movies (Engledow). She toured Australia for J C Williamson from 1911 to 1912.

<sup>60</sup> ST 14 July 1912: 2.

<sup>61</sup> SMH 1 February 1913: 11; *Kalgoorlie Miner* 8 July 1914: 5.

<sup>62</sup> See Pike and Cooper, 54-55; *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* 5 August 1915: 2; *Lone Hand*, 1 October 1915.

<sup>63</sup> *Theatre* 1 November 1915: 27.

<sup>64</sup> *Leader* (Melbourne) 4 December 1915: 35; 11 December 1915: 35; WA 25 December 1915: 6.

<sup>65</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser* 13 January 1916: 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Mail* (Adelaide) 8 April 1916: 6.

<sup>67</sup> *Mail* (Adelaide) 17 June 1916: 4; JCW to Lizette Parkes, 23 June 1916, Performing Arts Centre, Melbourne.

<sup>68</sup> Letter dated 10 December 1916, *Theatre* 1 February 1917: 10. James T Powers, to whom she refers, opened in *Somebody's Luggage* 28 August 1916, suggesting Cumming arrived in July or August. Also in the cast was Australian Ronald Byram, who had appeared with Cumming in January 1916: see *Argus* 10 January 1916: 9; *Theatre* 1 September 1916: 34.

<sup>69</sup> Simpson; ST 5 June 1921: 20; *Argus* 1 April 1933: 10; SMH 29 August 1935 Women's Supplement: 11; NYT 30 Apr 1960: 13; Jeffrey Simpson, <http://thepeakofchic.blogspot.com.au/2008/11/rose-cumming-and-ode-to-eccentrics.html>. Eileen married and leading rheumatologist Dr Russell Cecil and took over Rose's business after her death: see 16 Dec 1982: C12.

<sup>70</sup> *Theatre* 1 June 1917: 17; SMH 6 June 1917: 12; 13 August 1917: 5; *Queenslander* 23 June 1917: 29; *Leader* (Melbourne) 7 July 1917: 47.

<sup>71</sup> *Argus* 9 June 1917: 26.

<sup>72</sup> *Lone Hand* October 1917: 531-2.

<sup>73</sup> *Leader* (Melbourne) 28 July 1917: 47.

<sup>74</sup> SMH 24 November 1917: 8; 14 September 1918: 8.

<sup>75</sup> *Theatre* 1 May 1919: 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Washington Post* December 12 1920: 58.

- <sup>77</sup> *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton) 1 February 1927: 12.
- <sup>78</sup> *Washington Post*, 12 December 1939: 16; *Peninsula Herald* (Monterey), 15 October 1945.
- <sup>79</sup> LAT 28 July 1932: 3; NYT 3 August 1932: 13; *Chicago Daily Tribune* 3 August 1932: 3; Simpson.
- <sup>80</sup> SMH 2 February 1939: 25; NYT 19 August 1939: 18; 9 December 1939: 18.
- <sup>81</sup> *Australian Women's Weekly* 19 January 1955: 16; *Worker* (Brisbane) 7 February 1955: 10; *Miami News* 7 April 1963, 4D; NYT 23 February 1969: SM61.
- <sup>82</sup> NYT 23 Mar 1968: 31; 9 Sep 1982: D26.
- <sup>83</sup> NYT 28 Sep 1986: SM66; Simpson;  
[http://www.architecturaldigest.com/architects/legends/2007/04/cumming\\_article#ixzz1qVSXCdIw](http://www.architecturaldigest.com/architects/legends/2007/04/cumming_article#ixzz1qVSXCdIw)
- <sup>84</sup> SMH, 10 January 1914: 1.
- <sup>85</sup> For concept of "mind map" see Deacon, "Location! Location! Location!"

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