

‘BE MOVIEDOM’S GUEST IN YOUR OWN EASY CHAIR!’ HOLLYWOOD, RADIO AND THE MOVIE ADAPTATION SERIES

Frank Krutnik

Be Moviedom’s guest in your own easy chair! ... Attend a Hollywood ‘First Night’ as we pre-view a thrilling new movie, enroute to your nearby theatres ... Here’s Hollywood—the town, the people, the industry, transported to your loudspeaker.

Advertisement for CBS Radio’s *45 Minutes in Hollywood*, 1935¹

Before the advent of television, videotape and the DVD disc, Hollywood films generally played in cinemas for a few months before disappearing from public view. But although it was hard to *see* most films after their initial release, many did have what might strike us nowadays as a curious afterlife. Audio renditions of Hollywood films, often with top-flight stars, flourished on US radio from the 1930s to the 1950s. They were the principal bill of fare on a large number of dedicated movie adaptation series, as I will consider below, as well as playing a significant role in the repertoire of many other dramatic anthology programmes, including *Texaco Star Theatre* (1938–1940), *Philip Morris Playhouse* (1941–1953), *Radio Hall of Fame* (1943–1946), *Theatre Guild on the Air* (1945–1953), *Hallmark Playhouse* (1948–1953) and *General Electric Theatre* (1953).

The showcasing of Hollywood stars in telescoped versions of motion pictures was pioneered by *The Lux Radio Theatre*, which began a 21-year run in 1934. One of the most successful and most prestigious drama series of network radio’s ‘golden age,’ the *Lux* programme has attracted substantial attention from both enthusiasts and scholars.² Although the signature importance of this series should not be underestimated, it nonetheless needs to be appraised as part of a much broader programming trend that characterized a critical period in the development of US radio, during which the film and broadcasting industries were vying for domination of mainstream entertainment. As Michelle Hilmes considers, from the

Correspondence: Frank Krutnik, School of Media Film and Music, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9RH, UK. Email: f.s.krutnik@sussex.ac.uk

1920s to the 1950s the two industries existed in a symbiotic relationship with one another, the competition and collaboration between them coordinating their mutual development. The US cinema industry, she suggests:

... played a central role in the evolution of economic structures, program forms, and patterns of distribution in broadcasting, because Hollywood had functioned since the early 1920s as broadcasting's alter ego, its main rival and contributor, the only other force unified and powerful enough to present a viable alternative definition of the uses made of the medium by established broadcast interests, yet a necessary contributor to broadcasting's growth and success ... The ongoing process of conflict, compromise, and accommodation between the two has shaped the economic and expressive structures of both media.³

The first significant involvement of motion picture interests in broadcasting came from cinema entrepreneurs in the early 1920s. The phenomenal success of Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel, in particular, demonstrated the value of such media convergence. Ross Melnick identifies this charismatic cinema exhibitor as 'an unparalleled trend-setter, a man who, perhaps more than any other, had profitably transformed the motion picture theatre from a venue for movies into a house of culture, filled with high-class films, music, stage shows, opera, ballet and much more.'⁴ Following his stellar career managing deluxe movie palaces in the 1910s, Rothafel was hired in 1920 by New York's Capitol Theatre, the largest cinema in North America—and succeeded in transforming this struggling enterprise into the country's top-grossing movie house.⁵ Rothafel broke into radio when the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) invited him to broadcast orchestral performances live from the Capitol's auditorium, courtesy of the state-of-the-art sound system they had installed in the theatre. First airing in November 1922 over AT&T's newly opened WEAf, the first commercial radio station in New York, these broadcasts proved an immediate and enduring success. Helmed by the ebullient Rothafel, and eventually titled *Roxy and His Gang* (1923–1935), the programme provided the template for the big-time variety shows that flourished through the 1930s and 1940s.⁶

The success of Rothafel's programme prompted other exhibitors to follow his lead, with the Balaban & Katz, William Fox and Loew's circuits all setting up radio divisions to broadcast the lavish musical entertainments staged in their flagship theatres.⁷ As well as deriving additional benefit from the costly orchestras employed in their movie houses, exhibitors also recognized the valuable publicity such radio exposure could provide for their theatres, their film programmes, and their production affiliates. Several Hollywood studios also sought to capitalize on the promotional opportunities afforded by the broadcast medium. Warner Brothers set up radio station KFWB on their Los Angeles studio lot in March 1925, with equipment from Western Electric, and a year later established station WBPI in their showcase New York theatre. Sam Warner also toured the country with a portable transmitter, to deliver broadcasts from cinemas showing Warner Brothers films.⁸ Other studios similarly declared an interest in the medium. In 1927, a year after the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) launched the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), both the Paramount–Famous Players–Lasky combine and Loew's–MGM announced plans to set up their own radio networks.⁹ Neither net-

work actually materialized, however, owing to several factors that discouraged the Hollywood companies from further expansion into broadcasting. Besides facing pressure from exhibitors over their cooperation with the rival medium, the major film companies also drew unwelcome attention from official regulators. In July 1927, the Federal Trade Commission released a damning assessment of the film majors' anti-competitive business strategies, while the Federal Radio Commission, established five months earlier, also 'cooperated to quash the film industry's efforts to enter radio by way of the boardroom.'¹⁰

Blocked from securing direct ownership of national broadcasting chains, or achieving significant corporate influence within the networks, the film companies would eventually establish a very different relationship with radio. Hilmes suggests that 1932 marked the turning point in negotiations between the two industries, with the motion picture companies seeking greater involvement in programme production and exploiting more aggressively the value of star performers. Radio entertainers were showcased in custom-made screen vehicles, especially by RKO and Paramount, while movie stars were encouraged to appear as guests on variety programmes so they could plug their forthcoming releases.¹¹ As I will suggest below, the movie adaptation series provides an especially explicit illustration of this growing partnership between the film and broadcasting industries, and the 'process of conflict, compromise and accommodation' Hilmes speaks of.¹²

The most visible face of the intensifying synergy between the dominant popular media of the pre-television era, these programmes provide a unique perspective on the broader strategies and processes that shaped the mass entertainment landscape in the USA. The movie adaptation programme was a flagrant attempt by broadcasters to appropriate Hollywood's glamorous cultural capital, as a means of attracting both audiences and commercial sponsors during a key period in radio's expansion and consolidation. The film studios themselves needed to be assured that they would derive tangible benefits from sharing their stars and story properties. Complicating relations between these media was the fact that the radio and film industries each comprised competing interest groups that had very different stakes in, and expectations of, the rapprochement between cinema and broadcasting. The distinct agendas of networks and advertising agencies, or film producers, performers and exhibitors, rendered the movie adaptation series at times a hotly contested site of intermedial negotiation, and one that was avidly scrutinized by the watchdogs of the trade and mainstream press.

As Richard Jewell considers, with the radio audience exploding through the early Depression era, and with network broadcasting becoming dominated increasingly by powerful commercial sponsors and advertising agencies, motion picture executives were divided on the merits of cooperating with the rival medium. Some agreed with exhibitors that radio's phenomenal success posed a threat to the cinema business, while others saw it as a valuable means of 'generating awareness and enthusiasm for Hollywood product.'¹³ RKO and Paramount were most keen on forging connections with radio, as both studios shared corporate links with the major networks: RKO was, like NBC, an affiliate of RCA, while Paramount helped subsidize CBS in 1929 with a 49% stock purchase.¹⁴ These interrelationships led to such early collaborations as NBC's *The RKO Hour* (1928–1932), CBS' *The Paramount-Publix Hour* (1929–1931) and the RKO–NBC *Hollywood on the Air* (1932–

1935), which were variety programmes that utilized star talent from the film companies.¹⁵

Such cooperation between film producers and radio programmers provoked further complaints from cinema owners, who blamed the audio medium for dwindling box office receipts.¹⁶ In December 1932, the Hollywood majors (with the exception of RKO) sought to appease exhibitors by prohibiting contracted performers from appearing on radio.¹⁷ Above all else, the short-lived radio ban demonstrated that film studios were aware of the value of star talent as a bargaining tool in negotiations with the radio industry.¹⁸ With sponsors clamouring for the patronage of glamorous Hollywood performers, who could symbolize the distinctiveness of their products and attract large ready-made audiences, networks and agencies were eager to do business with the motion picture companies.¹⁹ The movie adaptation series would prove especially vital in cementing this relationship.

Lux Presents ... Hollywood

Lux Radio Theatre played a key role in convincing both Hollywood production companies and movie stars of the viability of radio as a showcase for their wares.²⁰ Hollywood-originated and Hollywood-themed programming was already well underway before the *Lux* programme relocated there in June 1936, with many screen performers guesting on such big league NBC variety extravaganzas as *The Fleischmann Yeast Hour* (1929–1938), *The Chase and Sanborn Hour* (1929–1948) and *The Kraft Music Hall* (1933–1949).²¹ There were several earlier attempts to bring films to the airwaves. In 1927, for example, MGM broadcast a ‘telemovie’ over its New York City affiliate WHN, which consisted of an announcer describing the action of the Greta Garbo–John Gilbert vehicle *Love* as it was being screened in Loew’s Embassy Theatre.²² Two star-packed CBS variety programmes that launched in 1934—*45 Minutes in Hollywood* (1934–1935) and influential screen columnist Louella Parsons’ *Hollywood Hotel* (1934–1938)—also included live enactments of scenes from forthcoming releases.²³

As drama began to rival the variety show as a programming staple through the early 1930s, the J. Walter Thompson (JWT) agency persuaded their client Lever Brothers to sponsor a dramatic anthology series featuring stars of stage and screen in versions of popular Broadway plays.²⁴ Produced by JWT’s New York radio department, *Lux Radio Theatre* made its debut on NBC Blue in October 1934 with a version of Austin Strong’s play *Seventh Heaven*, starring Miriam Hopkins and John Boles.²⁵ From the very start, the *Lux* programme distinguished itself from other drama shows by casting one or more well-known stars in the leading roles.²⁶ And it was Hollywood performers, rather than theatre stars, who proved to be the most desirable assets, owing to their broad appeal and their glamorous images. The only problem was that to appear on the show movie stars had to cross the continent to New York.²⁷

Lux Radio Theatre was an immediate critical success but achieved disappointing ratings, which Lever Brothers ascribed to its Sunday afternoon scheduling. CBS offered a more desirable timeslot—Mondays, 9–10 p.m., which the programme would occupy for 18 years—and on 29 July 1935 *Lux Radio Theatre* jumped ship from NBC.²⁸ During its first year on CBS the series gravitated increasingly towards

cinema. Besides featuring many more movie performers, the programme also began to emulate cinematic storytelling practice. In-house scriptwriter George Wells ejected the lengthy scenes, verbal exposition and spatial constriction of stage convention in favour of the fluidity and economy of 'motion picture technique'.²⁹ Wells significantly modified the original plays, rewriting dialogue to suit the audio medium and making creative use of musical cues and sound effects.³⁰

With ratings still low, Lever Brothers pressed JWT for a new strategy, and they decided to move the programme to Hollywood from 1 June 1936, so it could tap into the ready supply of top movie talent. Films also replaced theatre plays as the predominant source material. JWT's masterstroke, however, was enlisting noted film director, producer and showman Cecil B. DeMille as the programme's host and figurehead. Although popular discourse promoted DeMille as the show's 'author,' he neither produced nor directed the *Lux* dramas—but his involvement allowed the series to live up to its opening invitation, 'Lux Presents ... Hollywood.'³¹ The programme's transfer to the movie capital was part of an accelerated migration of radio programming from New York to Hollywood from 1936 onwards, after the Federal Communications Commission forced AT&T to reduce its toll rate charges substantially. Regular transcontinental broadcasting from the West coast was now a feasible proposition.³² *Lux Radio Theatre* proved an especially symbolic indicator of the broadcasting industry's new priorities, and the growing importance that Hollywood stars and glamour would play in its future. As David Glickman noted in a June 1939 article for the trade journal *Broadcasting*:

Advertisers want 'name' attractions and therefore must come to Hollywood for them. Listeners, too, are still fascinated by the 'magic name of Hollywood' ... By all odds these major buyers of talent and network time, according to the consensus, will continue to find Hollywood's highly exploited entertainment resources their richest advertising asset. It has been pointed out that as long as Hollywood talent shows continue to sell the sponsor's product, there will be buyers for this kind of program.³³

J. W. Thompson was well placed to capitalize on such developments. Within three years of establishing its Radio Department in 1927, JWT was outstripping NBC's in-house production teams in assembling programmes for its clients.³⁴ Its substantial experience in print media also equipped the agency with a finely tuned sense of the 'tabloid mind' that enabled it to attract the mass audience.³⁵ JWT had already pioneered the use of Hollywood stars for product endorsement, with a hugely successful print campaign for Lux Toilet Soap arranged through its affiliation with fan magazine *Photoplay*.³⁶ John Reber, head of the JWT's Radio Department, was keen to adapt this strategy to broadcasting—first, through star-driven variety programmes such as *The Fleischmann Yeast Hour* and *The Shell Chateau* (1935–1937), and then through *Lux Radio Theatre*.³⁷ The radio production department of JWT's Hollywood office was responsible for many of the top rated programmes of the 1930s: in March 1938, for example, it was producing not only the *Lux* show for CBS but also such highly popular NBC programmes as *The Chase and Sanborn Hour*, *The Kraft Music Hall* and *One Man's Family* (1932–1959).³⁸

JWT's success in recruiting Hollywood stars is generally credited to the agency's Southern California vice-president, Daniel Danker, who gained a reputation as 'Hollywood's no. 1 talent buyer.' A 1940 profile in *Broadcasting* claimed that by the end of 1935 Danker had not only signed 400 major Hollywood stars for radio but had also convinced them that 'a properly handled radio appearance enhances their value to the box-office and also "humanizes" them with the American public.'³⁹ The combined efforts of Reber, Danker and JWT's Hollywood production team made *Lux Radio Theatre* an immediate and lasting success. Its first Hollywood season saw the programme placed among the most popular night-time programmes, with its dazzling 25.1 Hooper rating in January 1937 exceeded only by the comedy variety shows of Eddie Cantor (1931–1954) (29.1) and Jack Benny (1932–1935) (28.6).⁴⁰ This rating suggests that in January 1937 over one in four of the radio sets in use among the Hooper sample was tuned to the *Lux* programme. With 22,666,500 US homes equipped with radio sets at the start of 1937, the Hooper figures imply that over 5.5 million US homes were tuned to this *Lux* broadcast.⁴¹ The audience was potentially much larger, as in many cases several listeners would be gathered around each receiver.⁴² Kate Holliday claimed in a 1941 *Movie Radio Guide* article that *Lux Radio Theatre* drew the 'largest audience in the history of drama, which is the same as saying in the history of the world,' estimating its size as between 20–30 million Americans each Monday night.⁴³

The *Lux* programme continued to attract high ratings. It ranked consistently among the top evening programmes, frequently proving to be US radio's most successful drama production.⁴⁴ Moreover, surveys showed that it appealed to a wide range of audiences. In March 1938, for example, CBS commissioned the Hooper-Holmes Bureau to investigate the programme preferences of rural listeners, whom regular ratings surveys generally bypassed, and their susceptibility to radio advertising.⁴⁵ Some variation was discerned in the listening habits of rural and urban audiences—for example, daytime radio was more popular among the former—but *Lux Radio Theatre* proved popular with both constituencies.⁴⁶ Other audience surveys revealed that the *Lux* programme had across-the-board appeal, attracting listeners of all ages, regions and income groups.⁴⁷ Besides being a ratings hit, however, the show was also a prestigious operation that was garlanded with awards and accolades. The annual polls of US radio editors and columnists conducted by the *New York World-Telegram* and *Motion Picture Daily* routinely voted it the top dramatic programme, and over several years it won citations from the Women's National Radio Committee as the best dramatic programme, as well as a 1943 George Foster Peabody award for 'Outstanding Entertainment in Drama.'⁴⁸

Lux Radio Theatre sat comfortably alongside such prestige drama series as *The Cavalcade of America* (1935–1953), *The Columbia Workshop* (1936–1947), *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* (1938) and *Theatre Guild on the Air*, even though its source materials lacked their experimental, literary, dramatic or historical provenance. Instead, Hollywood's grandiose entertainment values in themselves rendered the show a quality proposition. Publicity and promotional materials continually emphasized the programme's glamour and lavish budget. Celebrating the show's transition to Hollywood, for example, George Greer proclaims that:

When you're tuned in on *Radio Theatre* on Monday evenings, you are being entertained at a cost of \$300 a minute! \$17,500 was the amount of cash the

sponsor put down on the line for the first *Radio Theatre* broadcast from Hollywood. \$5,000 went to Marlene Dietrich; \$3,500 to Clark Gable ... Big money for big stars—a big program done in a big way! ... and through it all, the thrill of great pageantry.⁴⁹

Like many other commentators, Greer also draws attention to the painstaking professionalism of the show's large and dedicated production team.⁵⁰ In one of numerous behind-the-scenes profiles, Warner Grainger insists that when it comes to *Lux Radio Theatre* 'nothing is left to chance. Those smooth, workman-like productions which are turned out every week are the result of an organization which overlooks nothing, which pays nice attention to detail, and which gets the best out of the best.'⁵¹

Grainger pinpoints a further key aspect of the show's elevated standing, when he describes it as 'a sort of Moscow Art Theatre of the air.'⁵² This may be a debatable claim on several counts, but it highlights the strategic importance of the programme's theatrical associations. As Grainger elaborates,

Radio Theatre's production is contrived so that it manages to give the large studio audience the illusion of actually watching a stage play. This in turn conveys to the radio listener the feeling of sitting in a darkened theatre, when he hears applause, laughter, oh's and ah's ripple spontaneously through the spectators in the studio.⁵³

To preserve the aura of theatrical legitimacy, the Hollywood *Lux* dramas retained the three-act structure of the New York broadcasts, as well as a concluding 'curtain call' segment in which the host chatted with the performers. But where the New York shows were performed in a studio without an audience, the Hollywood broadcasts bolstered the sense of theatrical presentation by emanating from actual playhouses that were packed with enraptured audiences—initially the 965-seat Music Box Theatre and then, from 1940, the 2000-seat Vine Street Playhouse.⁵⁴ But rather than merely emulating the movies or theatre, Grainger stresses, the *Lux* programme 'developed a style and technique of its own, combining effectively elements of stage, film and radio.'⁵⁵

The networks, advertising agencies and commercial sponsors who shaped US radio from the early 1930s onwards may have had rather different agendas, but they recognized the importance of prestige to the development of an effective and acceptable blending of showmanship and salesmanship. Prestige played a key role in legitimating radio as an entertainment service that was rooted in, yet by no means consumed by, its commercial obligations. *Lux Radio Theatre* performed this function for CBS and, given the programme's remarkable success and stature, it is hardly surprising that there were so many attempts to imitate it.

Cavalcades of notables

Lux Radio Theatre's Hollywood reboot affirmed the value of films and movie stars as exploitable assets. Thereafter, the major networks were saturated with

Hollywood-originated programming that showcased name performers as leading attractions. A September 1937 item in the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, estimated that over 90% of the Fall schedule's headline radio programmes would derive from Hollywood and Los Angeles.⁵⁶ The most indicative example of this trend was NBC's *Good News* (1937–1940), which commenced on 4 November 1937. Produced by the Benton & Bowles agency for General Foods, this hour-long extravaganza was designed to exploit talent sourced from the most glamorous of Hollywood's film majors, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.⁵⁷ Broadcast live from Hollywood's El Capitan theatre, *Good News* was the most expensive regular weekly show ever mounted up to that point, thanks in large part to MGM's weekly stipend of \$25,000 for supplying talent.⁵⁸

Good News of 1938 was a solid ratings success but it was attacked by many critics for exemplifying the new wave of slick, Hollywood-driven radio fare. A *Los Angeles Times* review complained that the 'mania for guest stars is becoming almost a disease with big-time shows emanating from Hollywood. The novelty is wearing off, particularly after a patient public has heard every "new" guest on practically every network in town.'⁵⁹ The most sustained assault came from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*'s radio critic Larry Wolters, who campaigned for several months against the impact of the 'leap to Hollywood' on programming.⁶⁰ Questioning sponsors' faith in the ostentatious display of star names, Wolters warned that '[t]oo often such cavalcades of notables are devoid of form and idea.'⁶¹ Critics were more accepting of *Your Hollywood Parade* (NBC, 1937–1938), largely because this attempt by Warner Brothers to follow MGM into radio rejected the preening grandiosity of *Good News*.⁶² Like *45 Minutes From Hollywood* and *Hollywood Hotel* before them, both programmes not only showcased movie personalities but also enacted scenes from their respective studios' forthcoming releases.⁶³

While *Good News* and *Your Hollywood Parade* capitalized on the same fascination with stars and movies that made the *Lux* programme so successful, *Silver Theatre* (1937–1947) attempted a more imaginative interface between Hollywood and radio entertainment. Produced by Young and Rubicam for the International Silver Company, this 30-minute dramatic anthology series followed *Lux Radio Theatre* in casting Hollywood star performers in leading roles—including James Stewart, Rosalind Russell, Miriam Hopkins, Cary Grant, Joan Fontaine and Clark Gable. But the programme differentiated itself from the *Lux* show in key respects. Besides the fact some storylines were allowed to run across several weeks, *Silver Theatre* also pointedly rejected the stage and cinema materials associated with *Lux Radio Theatre* in favour of stories from 'novels, magazine articles and original manuscripts.'⁶⁴ An August 1937 item in *The Washington Post*, obviously based on promotional copy, insinuated that *Silver Theatre* aimed to counter the dramatic shortcomings of established adaptation programmes:

The reason the producers plan to depend largely on other sources than established Broadway and Hollywood vehicles is that the latter have generally been prepared for visual presentation in anywhere from 90 minutes to 2½ hours. It is felt that when a play of such duration is cut down for a 30-minute broadcast, frequently many of the meatiest portions are necessarily eliminated.

Short stories and the briefer novels, on the other hand, allow the adaptor to make a complete transcription of the author's plot and atmosphere for the microphone.⁶⁵

From 1941 onwards, *Silver Theatre* relaxed its attitude to film adaptations and dramatized versions of, among others, *Ladies in Retirement* (1941), *The Public Enemy* (1931), *The Whole Town's Talking* (1935), *Christmas in July* (1940) and *Only Yesterday* (1933). A further quality drama show, Orson Welles's 60-minute *The Campbell Playhouse* (CBS, 1938–1941), similarly drew on films as part of a more varied portfolio of adaptations, including such popular screen fare as *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935). While such programmes were clearly influenced by *Lux Radio Theatre*, they nonetheless sought to spin variations on its patented blend of film adaptation, star display and commercial promotion. Many subsequent drama series, however, showed no such qualms about embracing the *Lux* model.

CBS' *Screen Guild Theatre* was the first dedicated post-*Lux* film adaptation series.⁶⁶ This 30-minute programme began as a star-packed variety programme in January 1939, but after a few months shifted increasingly towards drama—and especially towards movie adaptations. The *Screen Guild* programme enjoyed a succession of commercial sponsors but it was able to attract a dazzling array of top Hollywood talent because it served as a fundraising platform for the Motion Picture Relief Fund. Members of the Screen Actors Guild, the Screen Writers Guild and the Screen Directors Guild donated their services to the programme without charge, with the sponsor paying their customary fees to the charity, and film studios offered free use of story materials.⁶⁷

From 1942 to 1948, *Screen Guild Theatre* played on Monday nights immediately after *Lux Radio Theatre*, their respective producers ensuring they worked as a complementary package.⁶⁸ This block programming strategy was extremely advantageous to *Screen Guild Theatre*, with the largest segment of the *Lux* audience staying tuned to CBS for the 30-minute show.⁶⁹ As a result, it was the only movie adaptation series besides the *Lux* programme to enjoy consistently high ratings. In the final week of 1943, for example, *Screen Guild Theatre* was placed 9th among the top evening programmes, with a Hooper rating of 20.6, while *Lux Radio Theatre* came in 4th with a rating of 25.7.⁷⁰ In the week of 21–27 December 1947, towards the end of its long run on CBS, the programme registered as the 14th most popular evening programme with a Nielsen rating of 21.2, compared with *Lux*'s number 2 position and a rating of 31.2.⁷¹ Audience analysis figures provided by the respective volumes of *Broadcasting Yearbook* indicate that between those dates both the CAB and Hooper ratings registered *Screen Guild Theatre* as a top 15 evening programme.⁷² The peak years of its popularity were when it was double-billed with *Lux Radio Theatre*, after which its ratings dropped significantly.

With *Screen Guild Theatre* following the *Lux* programme into the upper reaches of the ratings, it is hardly surprising that many similar series appeared in their wake. The early 1940s saw the establishment of the movie adaptation programme as a prominent production trend. Their star names and screen glamour ensured that, for a while at least, these programmes remained popular with commercial sponsors, even if few achieved strong ratings. Individual programmes, as well as

the broader phenomenon they exemplified, frequently received negative coverage from newspaper and entertainment trade journalists on the grounds that they were an 'impure' and inherently compromised form that failed to make the most of radio's expressive potential. These series also emerged, moreover, as sites of conflict between competing interest groups within the radio and film industries, at a time when both were facing transformations that would severely affect the entertainment marketplace they dominated.

Flare-ups and rapprochement

Three years after the demise of *Hollywood Hotel* Louella Parsons sought to rekindle her radio career with *Hollywood Premiere*. Like its predecessor, the new 30-minute series would offer gossip and chat with film stars, but its main focus would be on dramatized 'previews of major current motion picture releases.'⁷³ Sponsored by Lever Brothers (for Lifebuoy soap), with the William Esty agency handling production, the programme sparked intense controversy before it hit the airwaves because Parsons aimed to reprise her *Hollywood Hotel* policy of obtaining film stars on the cheap.⁷⁴ To exploit a valuable publicity platform, studios had coerced their stars into donating their services to *Hollywood Hotel* for free. Even though Parsons' latest 'free talent' ploy inspired complaints from the outset, she still managed to sign a stellar line-up of major studio performers for *Hollywood Premiere*'s 13 episodes.⁷⁵

A few weeks before its proposed launch, however, the viability of the programme was thrown into serious jeopardy by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG).⁷⁶ Having already protested Parsons' 'free talent' strategy on *Hollywood Hotel*, the Guild seized on *Hollywood Premiere* as a test case for a recently instituted policy—rule 6—that banned its members from contributing to commercial broadcasts without due payment.⁷⁷ *Broadcasting* reported that SAG refused clearance for the series in early February 1941, instructing its members:

... to refuse to appear on the weekly program unless such a refusal jeopardizes their contractual relations with film studios. The SAG contends 'free talent' shows, such as those offered by Miss Parsons, tend to depress standards of pay for film actors appearing on radio.⁷⁸

Parsons was actually intending to pay film talent for appearing on the show, but at American Federation of Radio Artists (AFRA) scale rates—which, SAG executive secretary Kenneth Thomson argued, was 'far below the usual standard of compensation for the actors.'⁷⁹ Supported by both AFRA and the Motion Picture Relief Fund, which saw the Parsons programme as a threat to *Screen Guild Theatre*, SAG aimed to replace the lax financial arrangements that governed the employment of film stars on such radio programmes with a more professional fee structure consistent with what they received for other work.⁸⁰

On 27 March, the day before the scheduled broadcast, Parsons agreed to abide by the SAG ruling, following a meeting with representatives from the Esty agency, SAG and JWT talent broker Danny Danker.⁸¹ Recognizing that the tight timeframe offered the producers little scope for renegotiation, SAG temporarily waived its

troublesome rule 6 to allow the programme to proceed on its original terms for the 13-week season.⁸² In an open letter carried by the entertainment trade press on the day of the broadcast, Parsons vowed to abandon her 'free talent' policy once the *Hollywood Premiere* season had run its course. When Parsons signed her next 13-week contract with Lever Brothers, in June 1941, the budget included a substantial allocation for talent costs.⁸³ Following their highly public victory over the formidable Louella Parsons, SAG extended its campaign against the underselling of screen performers on radio by targeting CBS's long-running variety programme *The Kate Smith Hour*. Obviously aware of the damaging publicity Parsons had attracted, Smith swiftly consented to the Guild's ruling on payment terms.⁸⁴

The success of the SAG campaign meant that high-cost film talent would henceforth be paid commensurate fees for appearing on all commercial radio broadcasts.⁸⁵ The embargo on cross-promotional 'free talent' deals rendered radio a lucrative sideline for in-demand movie stars, who could earn up to \$5–6000 for one appearance.⁸⁶ The film companies, however, wanted to prevent radio sponsors from hijacking the promotional value of their contracted performers. A meeting of major studio publicity chiefs on 11 March 1941 advised producers to dissuade name talent from appearing on commercial radio programmes altogether because, as *Broadcasting* reported, 'it was not to the best interest of talent to advertise products other than motion pictures.'⁸⁷ They recommended that producers restrict star appearances to sustaining and other non-sponsored programmes so that their promotion of films and the film industry was not sidetracked by the sponsors' agenda. Given the ongoing and intensifying cooperation between the film and radio industries, this was hardly a realistic prospect but was, in all likelihood, a further sop to exhibitors. As David Glickman had declared in a feature article in *Broadcasting* some months earlier:

The decade-long battle between motion pictures and radio, with film exhibitors doing most of the shouting, is rapidly fading and the two industries today are working closer together for mutual benefit.

There is an occasional flareup on the part of some film producer who threatens to bar his screen talent from the air as a means of appeasing exhibitor groups. But representatives of both industries understand the motive.⁸⁸

Outlining the growing rapprochement between the two industries, Glickman notes that film companies were seriously considering radio a source for talent and source material. Studios had already purchased stories dramatized in *Big Town* (1937–1952), *Silver Theatre* and *Texaco Star Theatre*, Glickman reports, and were also considering such entertainment programmes as *Lum and Abner* (1931–1954), *Professor Quiz* (1936–1948), *Good News* and *Information Please* (1938–1948) as contenders for the screen.⁸⁹ Most properties travelling from the airwaves to celluloid, however, ended up as low-budget entries in B series. Columbia Pictures, for example, produced eight films based on CBS' *The Whistler* (1942–1954) from 1944 to 1948, 10 *Crime Doctor* (1940–1947) thrillers from 1943 to 1949 and three films based on *I Love a Mystery* (1939–1952) in 1945–1946. The relatively limited traffic of material from radio to film, compared with radio's wholesale embrace of movies,

may derive once more from cinema owners' hostility to their broadcasting rival. A front-page item in a 1945 issue of *Variety* claimed that many exhibitors opposed the filming of radio programmes, not only because of their 'questionable b.o. values' but also because:

... theatre operators feel that they are building up or fortifying audience appeal for an opposition medium; that a radio-based picture plays a week or two in a theatre but builds the radio show, which is still considered substantial competition to theatres in many areas, for 52 weeks a year.⁹⁰

In protest, some exhibitors refused to book movie versions of the radio quiz show *Take It Or Leave It* (1944) and the situation comedy *Duffy's Tavern* (1945). They were also sceptical that radio programmes could transfer adequately to film.⁹¹ But if translating radio material to film could pose problems, the Hollywood studios were not so circumspect when it came to talent. As Glickman points out, the studios had enlisted a large number of writers and directors from the broadcasting industry by 1940, and many more would follow—especially during the war.⁹²

Despite exhibitor complaints, the substantial trading of properties and personnel across the two media through the 1940s affirmed their co-dependence. Film stars remained a crucial bargaining chip in the negotiations between networks, programme makers, commercial sponsors and motion-picture studios. And as the number of outlets for their services proliferated on the airwaves, stars were eager to capitalize on the opportunities they presented. During the war years, studios encouraged contracted talent to moonlight on radio programmes as a means of circumventing government restrictions on salary increases.⁹³ Screen stars appeared with increasing frequency as guests on variety or comedy programmes, as actors on such dramatic anthology programmes as *Silver Theatre* and *Suspense* (1942–1962), and, in particular, as leads in audio versions of Hollywood movies.

Movie adaptation as production trend

As the war neared its end, *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Screen Guild Theatre* were joined by numerous other programmes, mostly on CBS, which served up a similar diet of condensed movie adaptations, star names and commercial promotion. The most unusual example was NBC's *The Dreft Star Playhouse* (1943–1945), a hybrid of the movie adaptation programme and the daytime soap that was broadcast in daily 15-minute episodes.⁹⁴ The other series were more straightforward 30-minute dramatic anthologies, including *Romance* (1943–1957) and *Comedy Theatre* (1944–1945)—which offered generically specific variants of the *Lux/Screen Guild* formula.

Dedicated to 'all the great stories of all time—tender love stories of today, the memorable love stories of the past,' *Romance* was launched by CBS as a sustaining series in April 1943.⁹⁵ It persevered on the air until 1957, generally as a modestly budgeted programme with seasoned radio actors that derived its stories from a variety of sources.⁹⁶ From July 1944 to August 1946, however, the series (renamed *Theatre of Romance*) attracted sponsorship from Colgate and Halo Shampoo and enjoyed a much larger budget.⁹⁷ During this period, the show pre-

sented such glittering screen stars as Humphrey Bogart, Errol Flynn, Alan Ladd, Cary Grant, Ida Lupino, Loretta Young and Gregory Peck, especially after it relocated from New York to Hollywood in September 1945. The dramatic repertoire also shifted towards film adaptations, especially comedies and melodramas such as *My Man Godfrey* (1936), *A Star is Born* (1937), *Bringing up Baby* (1938), *Bachelor Mother* (1939), *Dark Victory* (1939), *Casablanca* (1943), *Penny Serenade* (1941), *Suspicion* (1941) and *The Woman in the Window* (1944).

In a blatant imitation of *Lux Radio Theatre*, the producers of NBC's *Comedy Theatre* enlisted as its host and figurehead the silent screen comedian Harold Lloyd, whose return to the limelight generated valuable press interest.⁹⁸ In the first broadcast, an adaptation of Preston Sturges's screwball farce *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), announcer Bob Williams describes the series as 'the only radio programme that brings you every week the greatest stars in the greatest comedies.'⁹⁹ Across its 32-week run, *Comedy Theatre* specialized in versions of romantic comedies such as *Ball of Fire* (1941), *Vivacious Lady* (1938), *Take a Letter, Darling* (1942), *Bachelor Mother*, *My Favourite Wife* (1940) and *Tom, Dick and Harry* (1941), with occasional farces (for example, *Room Service* (1938)) and comedian-centred films (including Lloyd's own *The Milky Way* (1936)). Stars who appeared on the programme included Lucille Ball, Edward G. Robinson, Gary Cooper, Dick Powell, Susan Hayward, Joel McCrea and Paulette Goddard.¹⁰⁰ Another short-lived 1944 venture, *The Star and the Story*, paraded its selling points with equal clarity. Produced by Young and Rubicam for the Goodyear Tyre Company, this 30-minute CBS programme was built around dependable MGM performer Walter Pidgeon, who served as both host and lead performer, alongside top female screen talent like Ingrid Bergman, Ida Lupino, Hedy Lamarr, Claudette Colbert, Barbara Stanwyck and Greer Garson. The series mostly adapted comic and dramatic screen romances across its 26-week season—including *The Awful Truth* (1937), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *Vivacious Lady*, *A Star is Born*, *My Favourite Wife* and *Magnificent Obsession* (1935)—as well as a few non-filmic sources (for example, Eugene O'Neill's play *The Straw*).

Although *Comedy Theatre* and *The Star and the Story* failed to sustain longer runs, sponsors persisted in the belief that star-driven movie adaptations could deliver large audiences and enhance brand recognition. With the *Lux* and *Screen Guild* shows continuing to fly high in the ratings, CBS unveiled four new high-profile and high-cost ventures in 1946—*Hollywood Star Time*, *Academy Award*, *The Hollywood Players* and *This is Hollywood*. In their different ways, each of these 30-minute series made a distinctive contribution to the movie adaptation programme as a production trend, but their troubled progress also raised doubts about its long-term viability.

Hollywood Star Time was an attempt by Twentieth Century-Fox to secure a regular promotional vehicle on network radio. In a package deal brokered by Foote, Cone and Belding, the programme was a collaboration between Fox and General Motors-Frigidaire, with the studio granting exclusive use of its talent and story properties for 13 weeks in exchange for promoting its new releases.¹⁰¹ The series opened on 5 January 1946 with Tyrone Power and Jeanne Crain in an adaptation of the 1927 romance *Seventh Heaven*, the first property tackled by *Lux Radio Theatre* and thereafter a popular choice for radio adaptation. In subsequent weeks, *Hollywood Star Time* brought a range of new and vintage Fox properties to the air,

including the romantic thriller *Laura* (1944), the family dramas *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945) and *Home in Indiana* (1944), the adventure film *The Mark of Zorro* (1940), the Western *The Return of Frank James* (1940) and the romantic comedies *Daytime Wife* (1939) and *Café Metropole* (1937). Fox stars presented on the show included Gene Tierney, Clifton Webb, Linda Darnell, Vincent Price, Cornel Wilde, Dana Andrews and Henry Fonda.

Fox publicly withdrew from its exclusive arrangement with *Hollywood Star Time* when its 13-week option expired, claiming it had no more than 25 stars important enough to showcase on the programme and that their continued participation would lead to over-exposure.¹⁰² With the airwaves already cluttered with movie star guest shots, this was an understandable concern. But the studio also feared that its commitment to the programme jeopardized their involvement with other shows, such as *Lux Radio Theatre*, which offered more advantageous promotional opportunities.¹⁰³ Fox may also have been discouraged by *Hollywood Star Time*'s unfavourable Sunday afternoon timeslot and the negative reviews of some early episodes.¹⁰⁴ Keen to persevere with the series, Foote, Cone and Belding evidently persuaded the studio to extend their arrangement, as the programme continued to rely on Fox stars and stories for a further nine weeks.

Hollywood Star Time's first season concluded on 2 June 1946, after 22 weeks on the air. The second season began a week later, but with a more attractive timeslot, 8 p.m. on Saturdays. The termination of the Fox deal left the agency free to negotiate with other Hollywood film companies, and they were able to secure, for example, *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) and Dick Powell from RKO, *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Alan Ladd from Paramount, and *The Suspect* (1944) and Charles Laughton from Universal. The downside of losing the exclusive relationship with Fox is that the programme had to compete with the growing number of rival adaptation programmes in a much more competitive marketplace for stars and stories.¹⁰⁵ Like the other series, it was consequently forced to rely on such overused properties as *A Star is Born* and *The Petrified Forest* (1936). Following disappointing ratings, the second season terminated on 27 March 1947, after 43 weeks.¹⁰⁶

As its name suggests, *Academy Award* sought to capitalize on the allure and prestige of the Oscars by adapting films that had won or been nominated for an award in some capacity.¹⁰⁷ Sponsored by E.R. Squibb and Sons, the series was produced by Charles Feldman's Hollywood talent agency Famous Artists Corporation for New York advertisers Geyer, Cornell & Newell. It aired versions of such respected films as *Kitty Foyle* (1940), *The Great McGinty* (1940), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Stagecoach* (1939), *A Star is Born*, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *Brief Encounter* (1945), with a stellar line-up of Hollywood performers that included Bette Davis, Joan Fontaine, Ronald Colman, James Stewart, Margaret O'Brien, Olivia de Havilland, Humphrey Bogart and Ginger Rogers. But, like *Hollywood Star Time* and *This is Hollywood*, *Academy Award* failed to secure high ratings, and it was pulled from the airwaves after 39 weeks in December 1946.¹⁰⁸ Announcing the show's cancellation, the *New York Times*' Sidney Lohman noted that:

Its departure was said to be due to a change in the advertising plans of the sponsor, but it was no secret, either, that it was having difficulty in getting

suitable vehicles, the supply of film scripts drying up under the constant repetition on many similar programs.¹⁰⁹

The unique selling point of *The Hollywood Players*, which began on 3 September 1946, was that 'The players themselves, not BBD&O, the agency, will select the dramas to be performed.'¹¹⁰ The programme was designed around a small group of major Hollywood stars—Claudette Colbert, Bette Davis, Joan Fontaine, John Garfield, Paulette Goddard, Gregory Peck, Gene Kelly and (ultimately) Joseph Cotten—who, as Sidney Lohman put it, would feature 'as the nucleus of a regular radio stock company which will offer weekly dramatizations of well-known pictures, novels, plays and short stories.'¹¹¹ *Billboard* reported that two thirds of the episodes would be film adaptations, with the remaining material derived from other sources. Although promotional copy declared that the series would represent a 'new high in dramatic star-spangled entertainment' and 'a new approach to the radio drama,' nearly all the broadcasts were based on films.¹¹² Despite some relatively fresh selections—such as *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943), *Sullivan's Travels* (1941) and *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1946)—the series also offered several overly familiar titles that cropped up repeatedly on other series—including *Vivacious Lady*, *Golden Boy* (1943), *Dark Victory* and *Bachelor Mother*. Even so, by comparison with the rest of the 1946 cohort of film adaptation series, *Hollywood Players* achieved respectable ratings.¹¹³ This was still not sufficient, however, to warrant the cost of a programme that *Billboard* identified as one of the most expensive of the season, and it was cancelled after 26 weeks rather than the projected 39.¹¹⁴

The fourth 1946 series, *This is Hollywood*, ran for 39 weeks from October 1946 to June 1947. A pet project of columnist Hedda Hopper, Louella Parsons' main rival as a purveyor of film gossip, it was produced by the Pedlar and Ryan agency for Procter & Gamble's Camay soap.¹¹⁵ The desire to emulate the success of *Lux Radio Theatre* is signalled by the fact that Frank Woodruff, its erstwhile director, was in charge of production. Like the other high-budget adaptation series, *This is Hollywood* attracted an impressive roster of Hollywood stars, including Ray Milland, Paul Muni, Edward G. Robinson, Ginger Rogers, Veronica Lake, Danny Kaye, John Wayne, Burt Lancaster, and Ida Lupino—but its most distinctive feature was the innovative selection of story properties. A deal struck with top independent film producers such as Hal Wallis, Walter Wanger, Samuel Goldwyn, William Goetz and British mogul J. Arthur Rank allowed the programme to offer a more diverse bill of fare than the other adaptation shows.¹¹⁶ This included the Westerns *Canyon Passage* (1946), *Along Came Jones* (1945) and *Ramrod* (1947), the noir thrillers *The Chase* (1946), *The Stranger* (1946), *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946), and the British films *The Seventh Veil* (1945), *The Wicked Lady* (1945) and *Stairway to Heaven* (a.k.a. *A Matter of Life and Death*, 1946).¹¹⁷

Another innovation was that, as *Billboard* put it, *This is Hollywood* 'sets a provocative precedent in that it uses new film properties before or during general release.'¹¹⁸ Its stellar guests and imaginative story choices did not, however, deliver impressive ratings: *This is Hollywood* started with a mild Hooper rating of 5.2 in its Saturday 10 p.m. slot, and by May 1947 was still only managing a low 6.5 rating.¹¹⁹ This was hardly sufficient to encourage other programmes to follow its lead. The cancellation of the series in June 1947 was blamed on a poor scheduling

slot (Saturday, 10 p.m.), and a weak rating that failed to justify the package's \$14,000 cost.¹²⁰

A 'falling-back-on-a-sure-thing' technique?

Reviewing the premier episode of *This is Hollywood* in October 1946 *Variety* observed that: 'Radio adaptations of top films with star personnel in the lead roles has by now reached the point of standardization which virtually guarantees smooth scripts and top characterizations.'¹²¹ Not everyone was so tolerant, however, and many critics attacked the movie adaptation as a retrograde programming strategy. Faced with Bette Davis reprising her 1938 hit *Jezebel* in the first episode of *Academy Award*, for example, *Variety* suggested that, despite the show's top-notch production values:

... in terms of radio progress, it all adds up to a formula and technique that's been riding the kilocycles for a long, long time ... The pix adaptation formula, as such, represents a 'falling-back-on-a-sure-thing' technique ... But more to the point, it's further evidence that the top bankrollers are no more inclined today to experiment with programming than they have been in the past.¹²²

Caught as it was between deputizing for the cinematic original and fulfilling its potential as audio entertainment, the movie adaptation was an ungainly hybrid that proved difficult to render successfully—especially when it tried to shoehorn 90–120 minutes of screen narrative into 22 minutes or so of audio drama. As Michele Hilmes notes, besides facing such time constraints radio scriptwriters also had to dispense with crucial visual cues that advanced the narrative and atmosphere of the original film. They responded to such limitations by trimming sub-plots to focus on the central narrative line, cutting or simplifying characters, and replacing the enactment of key narrative events with the verbal report of a narrator (most famously Cecil B. DeMille in the early *Lux* shows).¹²³ The result was sometimes far from ideal.¹²⁴ For example, Jack Gould described *Academy Award*'s rendition of *Jezebel* as 'a workmanlike job' but noted that if 'Miss Davis had little chance to develop a rounded characterization of the lady from New Orleans, that was chiefly the consequence of trying to compress so much into a half-hour and of somewhat drastic changes in the story itself.'¹²⁵ In a *Billboard* review, Shirley Frohlich suggested that *Screen Guild Theatre*'s attempt at *Yankee, Doodle Dandy* (1942), with original star James Cagney, illustrated:

... the stupidity of the studios and their radio accomplices in transcribing currently popular screen plays for air consumption. Scripts are, at best, half-baked rehashes of the screen plots and recapture none of the originals' success-making qualities. Acting is nothing but synthetic repetition of lines that have long since lost spontaneity and emotional meaning. Audience is divided between those who enjoyed the film and now have pleasant memories erased by crude, mechanical repetition and those who contemplate catching it and have the

experience spoiled for them by removal of elements of surprise and freshness of material.¹²⁶

Many reviewers suggested that, by slavishly imitating Hollywood productions, these programmes failed to capitalize on radio's distinctive strengths. Thus, *Variety* chastised Arch Oboler's 1944 adaptation of *The Petrified Forest* for NBC's anthology series *Everything for the Boys* because it failed to overcome 'one of the shortcomings radio is still heir to—the ability to condense an hour-and-a-half or two hour script into a 30-minute adaptation without forfeiting a great deal of the colour, atmosphere and character development necessary to create the complete whole.'¹²⁷ Compare this with the positive reception accorded Oboler's original radio script 'Strange Morning' when it was broadcast in the Mutual series *Arch Oboler's Plays* a year later. According to *Variety*, the programme:

... once more proves conclusively that good and inspired writing can emerge from the pen of the artist who is creating for air production, not only because he has something to say, but because he says it in a fluent and dramatic manner that in no way suffers by the compactness that radio time demands of the script. Oboler's script points up the advantages of writing directly for radio, with a full appreciation of its techniques, over the handicaps inherent in adaptations from either stage, screen or book.¹²⁸

For a while, Hollywood glamour and star names made sponsors, and some audiences, oblivious to such dramatic failings. For the networks, too, movie adaptations were an attractive proposition because their grandiose production values dignified the small-scale, domestic and ostentatiously commercial medium of radio. Only *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Screen Guild Theatre* proved to be unequivocal successes, however, and various developments in the mid-1940s rendered their rivals an endangered species. In particular, exorbitant talent costs coupled with overproduction made sponsors question whether such programmes were a worthwhile investment. *Variety* reported in February 1947 that 'Hollywood glamour shows' were having a rocky time because of a surfeit of programmes that relied on star power: 'it's a case of too much and too many ... there have been too many of the film star dramatics and the cost has been too much for what they fetch in rating.'¹²⁹ Although the 1946–7 season kicked off with seven programmes that depended on cinema guest stars or film properties, three of CBS' most lavish adaptation series—*Academy Award*, *The Hollywood Players* and *Hollywood Star Time*—were forced from the airwaves in quick succession.¹³⁰

The mid-1940s saw the beginnings of a backlash against expensive star-driven series in favour of modestly budgeted programmes that could deliver a more efficient investment per ratings point.¹³¹ In November 1943, *Billboard* introduced its Talent Cost Index (TCI), which was 'designed to interpret program popularity ratings in dollars and cents.'¹³² Avidly scrutinized by advertisers, networks and talent agents, the TCI sought to offer a more nuanced evaluation of the Hooper ratings by measuring them in relation to talent expenditure. It identified the cost of each ratings point and, from December 1944, the cost of reaching 1000 (urban)

listeners.¹³³ Such methods of ascertaining the value of star names led to a reappraisal of their place within radio programming.

In a 1944 article for the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, for example, John K. Hutchens pointed to the remarkable success of crime shows costing a mere '\$3,000 a week to produce, plus \$6,000 in air time for fairly extensive network coverage.'¹³⁴ Where the most popular variety and comedy programmes depended on expensive star talent, these crime series relied instead on pre-sold popular culture assets—either specific figures such as Sherlock Holmes, Ellery Queen and Charlie Chan, or more broadly familiar formats such as the detective story. As *Variety* put it in June 1945, such programmes were 'cued to a surefire technique that's aimed at ready, tailor-made audiences. Few are aimed at snaring a high rating, but for a low-budgeted show, the audience payoff is unmistakable.'¹³⁵ The Hooper report of 30 June 1946, for example, credits the crime programme *Mr. and Mrs. North* (1942–1954) with a respectable rating of 9.00. Although exceeded by, among others, the Eddie Cantor show (at 14.7) and *Screen Guild Theatre* (at 11.7), Table 1 indicates that *Mr. and Mrs. North* performed significantly better with regard to the ratings-costs ratio.¹³⁶

The accepted wisdom that star names delivered large audiences, as well as conferring prestige on the sponsor's product, was progressively challenged. As George Rosen wrote in a 1949 *Variety* article, 'The era of top-budgeted radio shows regardless of name value, is vanishing.'¹³⁷ Rosen pointed to the significant number of star-driven shows cancelled that season because sponsors were attracted either to low-budget radio programming or to the growing opportunities afforded by television. General Foods, for example, withdrew from the long-running Burns & Allen radio show, which cost \$16,000 a week, while Ford terminated both the Fred Allen series (budgeted at \$25,000 per week) and the *Ford Theatre* (\$15,000 per week) to concentrate on television. At the same, numerous low-cost programmes were flourishing and securing top 15 Hooper ratings, including *Casey, Crime Photographer* (1943–1955), and the sitcoms *My Friend Irma* (1947–1954) and *Our Miss Brooks* (1948–1957).¹³⁸

With their high talent costs, movie adaptation shows were a difficult sell during this much transformed broadcasting climate, and few new series emerged after the high-profile termination of the 1946 cohort. They also proved sites of continual contestation between the various parties involved in popular entertainment provision. While advertising agencies desired the most up-to-date film releases to promote the sponsor's wares, top studio executives were often sceptical about the impact of such adaptations. They feared not only that cooperation with

Table 1.

Programme	Hooper rating	Talent cost	Cost per rating point	Cost per 1000 urban listeners
<i>The Eddie Cantor Show</i>	14.7	\$13,500	\$818.37	\$1.03
<i>Screen Guild Theatre</i>	11.7	\$10,000	\$854.70	\$1.08
<i>Mr & Mrs North</i>	9.00	\$3,000	\$333.33	\$0.38
<i>The Rudy Vallee Show</i>	7.6	\$14,000	\$1,842.11	\$2.18

broadcasters would spark further protests from exhibitors, but also that a poor radio rendition could damage a film's commercial fortunes. Film companies thus sought to limit broadcasters' access to new releases by prohibiting audio translations within 6–12 months of a film's opening, a policy generally accepted by the major adaptation series.¹³⁹ Even so, there was still occasional friction between the two industries. In February 1944, for example, *Variety* announced that one major studio aimed to block radio programmers from tackling films that had been in release for less than a year, while another sought to prevent their contract performers from appearing in adaptations of other studios' releases.¹⁴⁰ This may have been yet a further attempt to pacify exhibitors, as the *Variety* item suggests, or even a power play designed to remind advertising agencies of how much they relied on the studios' cooperation.

The proliferation of movie adaptation series in the mid-1940s increased the pressure on film companies to adopt a more flexible policy. Paramount had experimented earlier by allowing broadcasters to adapt one current release, but curtailed the practice owing to the usual exhibitor complaints. In spring 1945 Twentieth Century-Fox also tested the waters by allowing *Hollywood Star Time* to tackle versions of two B films concurrent with their national cinema release, presumably because low-status B-thrillers such as *Shock* (1946) and *Strange Triangle* (1946) represented less risky box-office propositions.¹⁴¹ Subsequent months brought interventions on several fronts, especially when *This is Hollywood* sought to break the major studios' stranglehold over film adaptation programmes through its deal with independent producers to adapt films before or during first- or second-run cinema exhibition.¹⁴² That same month, November 1946, Republic Pictures, a lower tier film company specializing in low-budget westerns, serials and B-films, managed to break into *Lux Radio Theatre* for the first time, with a version of their prestige production *I've Always Loved You* (1946), directed by Frank Borzage, which aired a month before the film's release.¹⁴³ Universal-International Pictures was simultaneously negotiating with various radio drama series—including *This is Hollywood* and *Hollywood Star Time*—for adaptation rights to several of its current and future releases, with no restrictions on broadcasting dates.¹⁴⁴ As Universal's vice president, John Beck, announced:

We plan to encourage national network drama shows in featuring U-I scripts, original properties, and releases, during a period of consecutive weeks, regardless of whether they have been played off, are yet to be released, or are still in production. We are confident that radio presentations of the right type add immeasurably to box office results, regardless of how early broadcasts occur.¹⁴⁵

Abandoning traditional perceptions of radio as a threatening rival, Universal ventured where other film majors feared to tread by gambling on the cross-promotional advantages of film–radio tie-ins. Toward the end of 1946 the company placed 17 properties on various radio drama shows across 10 weeks, taking over *This is Hollywood* for two consecutive months from 30 November.¹⁴⁶ The anticipated backlash from exhibitors never materialized. Meanwhile, independent producers continued to build on earlier advances by utilizing the audio medium to

promote their wares. *Billboard* reported in May 1947 that they had scheduled an unprecedented number of stories and stars to reach the airwaves in the Summer and Fall seasons.¹⁴⁷ This situation was made possible by the deal with *This is Hollywood*, and by the establishment of the Radio-Motion Picture Relations Office. Set up by Mal Boyd, former radio director of Republic Pictures, this agency served as a liaison office between the radio industry and independent producers, arranging radio exploitation and adaptation on a picture-by-picture basis.¹⁴⁸ From January 1947, Boyd signed several independent film companies to the Radio-Motion Picture Relations Office and began negotiating broadcasting deals for individual stars and screen properties. He achieved his first success by placing the low budget Comet Productions comedy *Stork Bites Man* (1947), released through United Artists, with *Screen Guild Theatre*.¹⁴⁹

The pioneering efforts of Boyd and Universal would not have long-term impact on arrangements for the movie adaptation series, however. *Billboard* reporter Alan Fischler noted in August 1948 that, owing to its ties with independent producers, United Artists was the only Hollywood major to follow Universal's lead in allowing simultaneous radio versions of their film releases.¹⁵⁰ More significantly, the movie adaptation programmes were affected by the dramatic transformations besetting the US cinema business in the latter half of the 1940s, when it was struck both by a severe downturn in attendance and by the May 1948 Paramount decrees—which would ultimately dismantle the industry's vertically integrated structures. As Fischler notes, the major film companies embarked on a drastic economy wave that would substantially reduce the output of new product. Where 59 films were in production in August 1946, this dropped to 45 films in August 1947 and a mere 32 films in August 1948. Of the latter, Fischler suggests, no more than 40%—and probably only 25%—would be suitable for radio.¹⁵¹ The broadcasting medium's stricter censorship constraints meant that not all films were suitable for radio, making it difficult, for example, to adapt narratives featuring suicide, incest and sex.¹⁵² Musicals were also less desirable because of their increased production costs, while psychological dramas, Fischler suggests, 'have been overdone and are a drug on the market'.¹⁵³

Fischler anticipated that the shrinking pool of available new releases would lead to intensive competition between the adaptation series as they sought to fill their 39-week production schedules. The long-established *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Screen Guild Theatre* would have priority access to new releases, the former because of its reputation as 'radio's best unofficial spokesman for film biz' and the latter because of its links with the Motion Picture Relief Home. To make up for the shortage, Fischler proposed, radio shows would need to rely much more on revivals of earlier film properties. This suited the interests of film companies, who could use radio exposure of back-catalogue items as a testing-ground for potential cinematic reissues.¹⁵⁴ As cinema historian Thomas Schatz suggests, 'reissues became a veritable programming staple in the late 1940s.' While less than 10 films were re-released in the later war years, 20 were reissued in 1946, 40 in 1947, 105 in 1948 and 136 in 1949.¹⁵⁵

Alan Fischler's prediction about the increasing importance of older film properties to the adaptation series is confirmed by first season of *The Screen Directors' Playhouse*. This was one of the last significant star-driven movie adaptation

programmes to be introduced on US network radio.¹⁵⁶ In collaboration with the Screen Directors' Guild, NBC launched this prestige series on a sustaining basis in January 1949.¹⁵⁷ Although the title implies that the director will be its main selling point, the show actually relies, like its predecessors, on the allure of star performers (including John Wayne, Edward G. Robinson, Fred Astaire, Dana Andrews, Alan Ladd, Olivia de Havilland, Barbara Stanwyck and Betty Grable). The film's director served as another guest-star, appearing at the start and close of each broadcast for a brief and largely inconsequential chat at the microphone but having no creative input into the drama.¹⁵⁸ From January 1949 to June 1950, the show specialized in 30-minute adaptations of films, before shifting to a 60-minute format. During this period, *Screen Directors' Playhouse* aired 74 different stories. Although 39 of these programmes (or 53%) were based on relatively recent film releases, the majority from 1948, the remaining 35 (or 47%) were adaptations of films released from 1932 to 1946.

Conclusion

The movie adaptation programme was perhaps the signature genre of US radio's Hollywood phase. Even if most of these series never managed to escape the long shadow cast by the two most successful exponents, *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Screen Guild Theatre*, they nonetheless played a key role in signalling the priorities and aspirations of both broadcasting and cinema during a critical period of transition, growth and consolidation. Above all else, these programmes provide fascinating insights into a crucial process of media convergence, at times a conflictual but mutually beneficial collaboration between US manufacturing interests, the advertising industry, and radio and cinema as mass-market entertainment institutions. US radio began its precipitous decline in the early 1950s, when sponsors, agencies and networks shifted their allegiance to television and allowed the small screen to strip-mine radio's audiences, advertising revenues, scheduling policies and programming forms.¹⁵⁹ *Lux Radio Theatre* struggled gamely on until June 1955, after most of its competitors vanished from the airwaves. *Screen Directors' Playhouse* folded in September 1951, for example, while *Screen Guild Theatre*, *Hollywood Sound Stage* and *Stars in the Air* were all terminated a few months later. By the time the *Lux* show ended, radio was no longer significant as either a rival to or ally of the film industry, which was by now eager to do business with television.¹⁶⁰

Notes

- 1 45 Minutes in Hollywood (advertisement), *Photoplay*, January 1935, 18.
- 2 See for example Michelle Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: from radio to cable* (Urbana, IL, and Chicago, IL, 1990), 78–115; Connie J. Billips and Arthur Pierce, *Lux Presents Hollywood: a show-by-show history of the Lux Radio Theatre and the Lux Video Theatre, 1934–1957, Volumes 1 and 2* (Jefferson, NC, and London, 1995; John Dunning, *The Encyclopaedia of Old Time Radio* (New York and

- Oxford, 1998), 416–419; and Jeffrey Richards, *Cinema and Radio in Britain and America, 1920–60* (Manchester, 2010), 128–146.
- 3 Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 1.
 - 4 Ross Melnick, Station R-O-X-Y: Roxy and the radio, *Film History: an international journal*, 17(2–3) (2005), 217. See also Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel and the birth of the entertainment industry, 1908–1935* (New York, 2012).
 - 5 Melnick, Station R-O-X-Y, 217–219.
 - 6 Within a few months, *Roxy and His Gang* shifted from offering an exclusively musical bill of fare towards a vaudeville-style enterprise that presented a range of performance attractions. See Melnick, Station R-O-X-Y, 220–221, and Dunning, 589–590.
 - 7 Melnick, Station R-O-X-Y, 223.
 - 8 See Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 33–34, and Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American cinema's transition to sound, 1926–1931* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London, 1997), 42–44. Warner Brothers went into partnership with Western Electric in April 1926 to form the Vitaphone Corporation, as a means of exploiting Western Electric's sound-on-disc system for the synchronized sound film.
 - 9 Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 38–45.
 - 10 Crafton, 45. See also Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 40–46. Having recently increased its portfolio of exhibition venues by acquiring the Balaban & Katz chain, Paramount may have been wary of further costly expansion into the entertainment business. Hilmes suggests that the film company may have also been reluctant to follow through with its plans for a radio network for fear of alienating RCA and AT&T, who owned the two most viable systems for the synchronized sound film (see Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 40–43). Even so, the transition to sound did intensify cooperation between the two media at another level, as the film industry eagerly recruited radio technicians to make use of their expertise in sound recording and reproduction, setting them to work in both production studios and exhibition venues (see When Radio Answered a Call to Hollywood, *New York Times*, 10 August 1930, XX12).
 - 11 See Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 55, and Richard B. Jewell, Hollywood and radio: competition and partnership in the 1930s, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 4(2) (1984), 126–130.
 - 12 The growing cooperation between the two media was also facilitated by Hollywood's transition to sound in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which equipped the film companies with stocks of performers and dramatic properties that could transfer with relative ease to the audio medium.
 - 13 Jewell, 125–126.
 - 14 Ibid., 126.
 - 15 Ibid., 126–129. See also Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 58, and Richard Koszarski, *Hollywood on the Hudson: film and television in New York from Griffith to Sarnoff* (Metuchen, NJ, 2010), 428.
 - 16 Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 42.
 - 17 See Jewell, 130, and Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 55–59.
 - 18 Ibid., 58.

- 19 For more on relations between Hollywood stars, radio and advertising, see Cynthia B. Meyers, *Admen and the shaping of American commercial broadcasting, 1926–50* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2005), 165–170, and *The problems with sponsorship in US broadcasting, 1930s–1950s: perspectives from the advertising industry*, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 31(3) (September 2011), 355–372.
- 20 Jewell, 128.
- 21 Michelle Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis, MN, and London, 1997), 121–123.
- 22 Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 44–45.
- 23 See Jewell, 131, and Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 67.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 61–65, and Billips and Pierce (1), 3–4.
- 25 Billips and Pierce (1), 74–75. From the late 1920s to the early 1940s, NBC operated two distinct networks, the more popular and more commercial NBC Red and the smaller NBC Blue, which carried more non-sponsored public service broadcasts. NBC's parent company RCA was forced to sell the Blue network as a result of increasing pressure from the FCC, which sought to curb the monopolistic powers of the two major networks, and it was purchased by American Broadcasting Company (ABC)—which began broadcasting under this name in 1945. See Michele Hilmes, NBC and the network idea: defining the 'American System', in Michele Hilmes (ed.), *NBC America's Network* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA & London, 2007), 12–15.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 27 Even so, illustrious Hollywood names such as James Cagney, Paul Muni, Irene Dunne and Cary Grant graced the *Lux* microphone during its first season (*Ibid.*, 73–91).
- 28 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 11–12.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 12. For more on Wells' approach to radio adaptation, see Orrin E. Dunlap Jr., *Sleight of Hand with Drama*, *New York Times*, 28 July 1935, X11.
- 31 Billips and Pierce (1), 13.
- 32 Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 62–63, 67, 71.
- 33 David Glickman, *Hollywood Points to its Sales Record, Belittling Talk of an Exodus Eastward*, *Broadcasting*, 15 June 1939, 30.
- 34 Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 115–116.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*, 117–118.
- 38 J.W.T Staff Shifts, *Broadcasting*, 1 March 1938, 45.
- 39 We Pay Our Respects To—Daniel Joseph Danker, Jr., *Broadcasting*, 1 August 1940, 83, 97.
- 40 Data derived from Harrison B. Summers (ed.), *A Thirty Year History of Programs Carried on National Radio Networks in the United States, 1926–1956* (New York, 1971/1958), 59, 61. Several ratings systems were in use from the 1930s to the early 1950s. Launched in 1930, the Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting (CAB) ratings were the industry standard until the introduction of the competing Hooper system in 1934. A non-profit organization supported by leading advertisers, agencies and networks, CAB issued semi-monthly reports that

offered ratings for each sponsored network programme. Up to 1944, CAB ratings were based on a telephone recall system, in which researchers phoned listeners in major cities several times a day and plotted their listening habits. Both the CAB and Hooper ratings represented the percentage of radio sets in the sample households tuned to a particular programme at a particular time. (See A. W. Lehman, Rise in Listening Shifts Program Rating, *Broadcasting*, 15 January 1940, 21, 80–81). C.E. Hooper's coincidental telephone method quickly gained favour with many industry analysts, but CAB ratings persevered until 1946 (for example, in *Broadcasting* and *Broadcasting Yearbook*)—when Hooper bought out existing CAB subscribers. Hooper issued monthly figures for the top 15 evening programmes, which were carried, for example, by *Billboard*. Hooper's ratings were in turn eclipsed by the metered listening records pioneered by A. C. Nielsen, which purchased Hooper's national radio and television services in 1950. For a robust overview of these various systems, see Hugh Malcolm Belville, Jr., *Audience Ratings: radio, television, cable* (revised edition), Hillsdale, NJ, Hove and London, 1988), 1–61.

- 41 O.H. Caldwell, Production of Civilian Radio Sets—1922 Through 1953, *Broadcasting Yearbook*, 1954, 378.
- 42 These are very rough estimates, as the CAB and Hooper surveys were both biased, for example, towards urban audiences and homes with telephones. They do nonetheless provide some sense of the scale of the listener base for top-rated programme like *Lux Radio Theatre*.
- 43 Kate Holliday, Work Harder, Work Longer, *Movie Radio Guide*, 15 February 1941, 43.
- 44 Detailed information about ratings during this time can be found in *Broadcasting*, *Broadcasting Yearbook* and *Billboard*, as well as Harrison B. Summers' useful year-by-year compilation of radio programming data, which draws on the CAB, C. E. Hooper and A. C. Nielsen surveys.
- 45 Rural Listeners Have Tastes Similar to City Listeners, CBS Survey Shows, *Broadcasting*, 15 February 1939, 16. The CAB also followed suit in canvassing rural listeners—see CAB Study of Rural Listening Habits Shows McCarthy and Benny as Leaders, *Broadcasting*, 1 June 1939, 18. At this time, 69% of rural homes had radios, by comparison with 91% of urban homes.
- 46 For example, a 1939 CAB study found *Lux Radio Theatre* to be the favourite drama show of rural listeners, and 7th favourite show overall (*ibid.*). See also CAB Finds Rural Audience Uses Radio In Day More Than City, But Less at Night, *Broadcasting*, 12 May 1941, 12.
- 47 See, for example, Radio Tops Media in Youth Survey, *Broadcasting*, 15 September 1939, 90; *Lux Theatre* First, *Broadcasting*, 2 June 1941, 36; Listener Interest Widely Increased, CAB Data Reveals, *Broadcasting*, 15 September 1939, 40; H. M. Beville, Jr: The ABCD's of Radio Audiences, *Broadcasting*, 12 May 1941, 63; and Varied Regional Radio Choice Found By CAB, *Broadcasting*, 21 May 1945, 18.
- 48 See, for example, Results of Radio Popularity Poll, *Broadcasting*, 1 February 1938, 74; Charlie McCarthy Again Is Selected As Radio Leader, *Broadcasting*, 1 January 1940, 18; Jack Benny Leads Annual Talent Poll; Swing is Ranked as Top Commentator, 1 January 1941, 17; Benny Again Wins Radio Editor Poll As Favourite Comedian, Favourite Show, *Broadcasting*, 3 February 1941, 14; Poll

- of Radio Editors Picks Hope as Champion, *Broadcasting*, 22 December 1941, 56; Bob Hope Replaces Jack Benny at Top of Annual Balloting by Radio Editors, *Broadcasting*, 9 February 1942, 51; Don McNeill, Bob Hope, Ameche Lead in Annual Poll by *Movie-Radio-Guide*, *Broadcasting*, 18 May 1942, 34; Bob Hope Top Comedian, Benny Second in World-Telegram's Annual Radio Poll, *Broadcasting*, 18 January 1943, 22; Hope Again Wins Top Comedian Award, Blue-CBS Chosen for Daytime Honours, *Broadcasting*, 11 December 1944, 22; Bob Hope Voted Best in Fame Poll; Allen, McGee, Crosby Tied for Second, *Broadcasting*, 17 December 1945, 17; Women's National Radio Committee Citations, 1938 *Broadcasting Yearbook*, 188; Women's National Radio Committee Citations, 1939, *Broadcasting*, 1 May 1939, 26; Forum Programs Preferred by Women WNRC Finds in Making Annual Awards, *Broadcasting*, 1 June 1940, 66; and ... for Meritorious Public Service ... [CBS advertisement], *Broadcasting*, 15 May 1944, 24.
- 49 George Greer, The *Radio Theatre* Goes Hollywood, *Radio Guide*, August 1936, 24. A 1948 article boasts that 'To put on one *Lux* hour costs as much as to run a Broadway hit for a week!' (Fifteen Years With *Lux Radio Theatre*, *Radio Album*, Fall 1948, 13).
- 50 Greer, 24, 43. Esteemed broadcasting critic Jack Gould credited the show's success to the fact that '*Radio Theatre* stands as almost a model of pure radio craftsmanship, an example of unfaltering professionalism in staging a drama for the microphone' (Jack Gould, Programs in Review, *New York Times*, 12 September 1948, X9).
- 51 Warner Grainger, Twelve Years a Hit: *Radio Theatre* Owes its Long Run to Behind-the-Scenes Perfection, *Tune In*, May 1946, 17.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid., 18.
- 54 Billips and Pierce, 23.
- 55 Grainger, 19. For contrasting accounts of *Lux*'s theatrical presentations, see Philip K. Scheuer, A Town Called Hollywood, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1936, C1, and Headaches and Heartaches Lurk Behind De Mille's Production of *Lux Theatre of the Air*, *Washington Post*, 28 February 1937, T7.
- 56 Carroll Nye, Westward March of Radio Reviewed, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 September 1937, C8.
- 57 *Good News* took the slot previously occupied by Maxwell House's venerable musical variety series *Show Boat* (1932–1937). *Good News of 1938*, the first series, was followed by *Good News of 1939* and *Good News of 1940*, before being rebranded as *Maxwell House Coffee Time* (Dunning, *Good News of 1938*, 286–287).
- 58 See Larry Wolters, Radio, Motion Picture Costs Are Compared, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 August 1938, SW4, and Larry Wolters, News of Radio, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 November 1937, 18.
- 59 Guest Star List Grows, *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1938, A3.
- 60 Larry Wolters, Thinks Radio Erred in Leap to Hollywood, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 November 1937, 19.
- 61 Larry Wolters, News of Radio, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 November 1937, 25. See also Larry Wolters, Listeners Rises to Hollywood Radio Defense, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 December 1937, W10.

- 62 See, for example, John H. Henry, Harry Conn in 'Earaches of 1938', *The Washington Post*, 21 November 1937, TS5, and Larry Wolters, News of Radio, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 December 1937, 27.
- 63 Larry Wolters, News of Radio, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 November 1937, 18.
- 64 Carroll Nye, Noted Actors to Star in Dramatic Show, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 1937, 14.
- 65 C.B.S. Announces New "Theatre" Half-Hour, *The Washington Post*, 22 August 1937, A9.
- 66 The programme was also known as *The Gulf Screen Guild Show*, *The Gulf Screen Guild Theatre*, *The Lady Esther Screen Guild Players*, *The Camel Screen Guild Players* and (on NBC from 1948 to 1950) as *The Camel Screen Guild Theatre*. Purchased by ABC, it ran, initially on a sustaining basis but then, under Buick's sponsorship in an expanded 60-minute format, as *The ABC Screen Guild Players* from September 1950 to May 1951. The series returned to CBS as a sustaining programme from December 1951 to June 1952, where it was split into two separate 30-minute programmes, *Stars in the Air* and *Hollywood Sound Stage*, which were put together as a double bill. Both shows similarly operated as benefits for the Motion Picture Relief Fund (see CBS to Air 2 Drama Shows For Film Fund, *Billboard*, 1 December 1951, 5; New Orleans Meet Expresses Approval, *Broadcasting*, 17 December 1951, 87; Two CBS Shows Benefit Movie Relief Fund, *Broadcasting*, 26 November 1951, 5). After 13 episodes, *Hollywood Sound Stage* was replaced by *The Screen Guild Theatre*, which ran in conjunction with *Stars in the Air* for 17 further weeks. To avoid confusion, I will refer to the various incarnations of *Screen Guild Theatre* under this name. For a valiant attempt at making sense of the programme's history, see The Screen Guild Radio Programs, The Digital Deli Too, <http://www.digitaldeliftp.com/Digital-DeliToo/dd2jb-Screen-Guild.html> (accessed 12 May 2012).
- 67 See 'Round About the Studios, *New York Times*, 28 May 1939, X10; Screen Talent is Signed for Gulf Guild Program, *Broadcasting*, 15 September 1939, 40; Carolyn Holt, That Others May Live, *Radio and Television Mirror*, April 1940, 29–30, 84–85; and For Free—and For Fun!, *Movie-Radio Guide*, November 1943, 48–49. For consideration of the Motion Picture Relief Fund, see Jay K. Springman and Carol Pratt, The home that radio built, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 2(2) (Fall 1978), 265–274.
- 68 Dunning, 600–601.
- 69 See The Billboard Talent Cost Index, *Billboard*, 12 February 1944, 8; Hope and Lux down in TCI, *Broadcasting*, 22 April 1944, 9; 'Audience-Delivering' Stations, *Billboard*, 20 April 1946, 18; and Audience Sources & Distributors, *Broadcasting* 17 August 1946, 8.
- 70 Talent Cost Index, *Billboard*, 11 December 1943, 6.
- 71 Nielsen Index Program Ratings, *Billboard*, 7 February 1948, 10.
- 72 See A. W. Lehman, Program Popularity in 1943, *1944 Broadcasting Yearbook*, 32; George H. Allen, Program Popularity in 1944, *1945 Broadcasting Yearbook*, 38; George H. Allen, Program Popularity in 1945, *1946 Broadcasting Yearbook*, 38; and C. E. Hooper, 1947 Radio Audience Analysis, *1948 Broadcasting Yearbook*, 30.
- 73 Plans Completed for Louella Parsons to Conduct Filmland Series for Lever, *Broadcasting*, 10 March 1941, 10.

- 74 Samantha Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood: a biography of Louella Parsons* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London, 2005), 166–169. Barbas notes that Parsons also finagled free appearances from stars on her earlier gossip programmes for *Sunkist* (1931) and *Charis* (1934), 149–151, 161–164.
- 75 See *Hollywood Inside*, *Daily Variety*, 8 January 1941, 2, and Barbas, 229.
- 76 See *Louella Parsons Contract Still Pends*, *Variety*, 12 February, 2, and *Esty Abandons Parsons Program*, *Variety*, 19 February, 22.
- 77 See *Louella Parson's 'Free Talent' Radio Commercial Tabooed by SAG*, *Variety*, 5 February 1941, 1, 32, and Barbas, 189, 202.
- 78 *Plans Completed for Louella Parsons to Conduct Filmland Series for Lever*, *Broadcasting*, 10 March 1941, 10.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 10, 52.
- 80 *Ibid.* AFRA adopted a similar ban on 'free performance' following the SAG ruling (*Hollywood Premiere on a Lavish Scale Marks Promotion of New Lever Series*, *Broadcasting*, 24 March 1941, 14).
- 81 *Hollywood Artists Halt Lever Series*, *Broadcasting*, 31 March 1941, 8.
- 82 *Ibid.* The first episode, a version of Universal's forthcoming *The Flame of New Orleans*, with Marlene Dietrich—was savaged by *Variety*, which described it as 'a poor show ... ineptly adapted, weakly played, and made to sound ludicrous by Miss Parsons' over-done intro and "interviews" with the stars and producer ... Show deteriorated as it went along' (Louella Parsons (review), *Variety*, 2 April 1941, 30).
- 83 Barbas, 231. According to Barbas, Lever Brothers responded to the outcry over *Hollywood Premiere* by offering full payment to the 120 actors signed for the programme. Parsons intended to withdraw from the series after its first season, but returned for a second season in Fall 1941 (untitled item, *Broadcasting*, 13 April 1941, 39).
- 84 Guild warns Kate, *Broadcasting*, 21 April 1941, 35.
- 85 The *Screen Guild* programme was excused from the SAG ruling owing to its charitable remit (*Plans Completed for Louella Parsons to Conduct Filmland Series for Lever*, *Broadcasting*, 10 March 1941, 52).
- 86 N.Y. *Guest Shots On Upbeat*, *Billboard*, 19 October 1946, 10.
- 87 *Only Sustainers*, *Broadcasting*, 24 March 1941, 14.
- 88 *David Glickmann, Hollywood Turning to Radio for Talent: Feud Turns to Friendship as Two Industries Work Together*, *Broadcasting*, 1 October 1940, 20.
- 89 *Ibid.*, 20, 74.
- 90 *Oppose Films Based on Radio*, *Variety*, 11 June 1945, 1.
- 91 *Ibid.*
- 92 The writers included Irving Brecher, Willis Cooper, Irving Reis, Ed Beloin, Ken Englund, Nat Hiken, Dorothy Yost and Arch Oboler, while Reis, Frank Woodruff, Norman Corwin, and Orson Welles were among the directors (Glickmann, 74–75). See also *Films Drafting Radio Writers*, *Variety*, 4 January 1944, 22.
- 93 N.Y. *Guest Shots On Upbeat*, *Billboard*, 19 October 1946, 10.
- 94 See Haviland F. Reves, *Hollywood Theatre of the Air* (review), *Billboard*, 24 July 1943, 13.
- 95 Quoted in Dunning, 584.

- 96 For details of known episodes of this series, see Martin Grams, Jr., *Radio Drama: American programs, 1932–1962* (Jefferson, NC, and London, 2000), 413–418.
- 97 Colgate Steps Up Romance Theatre; Budget Hiked 50%, *Billboard*, 4 November 1944, 11.
- 98 Also referred to as *Comedy Theatre of the Air*, *The Old Gold Comedy Theatre* and *Harold Lloyd Comedy Theatre*, the programme was produced by the Lennen & Mitchell advertising agency for the Lorillard tobacco and packaged by the MCA talent agency (Harold Lloyd Fronts New Old Gold Seg, *Billboard*, 14 October 1944, 6). For coverage of Lloyd's involvement, see Mr. Lloyd Emerges From Retirement, *New York Times*, 12 November 1944, X7. A *Washington Post* item on the show's inaugural broadcast credits Lloyd as its director and claims that he 'plans to conduct his program along the lines of Cecil B. DeMille's *Lux Radio Theatre*.' (Sonia Stein, New *Comedy Theatre* Has Premier Tonight, *Washington Post*, 29 October 1944, S6). Claudette Colbert maintains the fiction of Lloyd's authorship on the opening episode, introducing him as the programme's host and director (*The Palm Beach Story*, *Comedy Theatre* #1, 29 October 1944).
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 *Comedy Theatre* did not figure among the top 15 rated evening programmes. In January 1945, for example, it achieved a modest Hooper rating of 10.6, by contrast with *Screen Guild Theatre*'s 23.4 and *Lux Radio Theatre*'s 24.5 (see Summers, 125).
- 101 Frigidaire Buys 20th-Fox Pkge., CBS Sun. P.P.'s, *Billboard*, 15 December 1945, 5.
- 102 20th Century-Fox To Drop Tie-Up With *Star Time*, *Billboard*, 8 May 1946, 5.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 See Jack Gould, Programs and People, *New York Times*, 13 January 1946, X5, and Hollywood Star Time (*Laura*) (review), *Variety*, 16 January, 28.
- 105 20th Century-Fox To Drop Tie-Up With *Star Time*, 5.
- 106 See Frigidaire is Like Woman; Holds *Star Time*; Drops *X*, *Billboard*, 28 September 1946, 11, and Too Short For A Head: ABC Wed. Line-Up Adds Kaye; Eds as Talent Scouts on WOR, *Billboard*, 5 October 1946, 12.
- 107 CBS to Present 'Oscar' Winning Movies on the Air, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 February 1946, 26.
- 108 Squibb paid up to \$4000 for talent on each broadcast, plus a further \$1600 per week to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for use of the title (Dunning, 4). Ratings for the show generally came in below 8%—for example, it secured a Hooper rating of 7.8 in the July 15 Hooper survey, just above *Theatre of Romance*'s 7.2 but below *Screen Guild Theatre*'s 10.5 (Drama Talent Cost Index, *Billboard*, 3 August 1946, 10).
- 109 Sidney Lohman, Radio Row: One Thing and Another, *New York Times*, 24 November 1946, 91.
- 110 Stars Pick Scripts For New Schenley *Hollywood Players*, *Billboard*, 17 August 1946, 8.
- 111 Sidney Lohman, One Thing and Another, *New York Times*, 18 August 1946, 55.
- 112 Natalie Rogers, Listen: News Notes From CBS, *The Washington Post*, 1 September 1946, S5.

- 113 The Hooper survey of September 15, for example, placed *Hollywood Players* as the 9th most popular evening programme, with a rating of 10.5—compared with *Screen Guild Theatre* at #3 with a Hooper of 13.1, and *Lux Radio Theatre* at #7, with 11.5 (WSM's *Grand Ole Opry Goes to Town* (advertisement), 7 October 1946, *Broadcasting*, 41). In the 30 September survey, it was the 7th most popular evening programme, with a Hooper rating of 12.8 (compared with *Lux* at #1, with a Hooper of 16.2, and the *Screen Guild* programme at #2, with a Hooper of 15.9). (*Lux Theatre Tops Nighttime Hooper*, *Broadcasting*, 7 October 1946, 66).
- 114 Stars Pick Scripts For New Schenley *Hollywood Players*, 8.
- 115 Several sources, including the entry in Dunning, 313–314, identify this as a 15-minute programme, but they appear to be confusing *This is Hollywood* with Hopper's various gossip series.
- 116 Camay Soap Setting Pic Deal To Edge In on *Lux Theatre*, *Billboard*, 22 June 1946, 51.
- 117 See Grams, 497–499.
- 118 Pix-Air Reapproachment Due: Camay 'Test' May End Ban on Day and Date Radio Use of Hollywood Film Stories, *Billboard*, 23 November 26, 12.
- 119 Ibid., 13. See also Network Program Reviews and Analyses, *Billboard*, 31 May 1947, 12.
- 120 P&G Shops For Cheapie For Camay, *Billboard*, 7 June 1947, 8.
- 121 *This is Hollywood* (review), *Variety*, 9 October 1946, 52.
- 122 *Academy Award Theatre* (review), *Variety*, 3 April 1946, 34.
- 123 Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 105–106.
- 124 For a detailed considered of one filmic adaptation across several series, see Frank Krutnik, 'Barbed wire and forget-me-not': the radio adventures of *Laura* (1944), *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* 5(3), December 2012, 297–314.
- 125 Jack Gould, Marginal Program Notes, *New York Times*, 7 April 1946, 55.
- 126 Shirley Frohlich, *Screen Guild Theatre* (review), *Billboard*, 31 October 1942, 7.
- 127 *Everything for the Boys* (review), *Variety*, 26 January 1944, 34.
- 128 *Arch Oboler's Plays* (review), *Variety*, 11 April 1945, 26.
- 129 Air Fade for Pic Star Shows, *Variety*, 12 February 1947, 26.
- 130 Ibid.
- 131 Hoop Hop of the Whodunits, *Variety*, 25 December 1946, 28.
- 132 Point Price Tags Startle Radio, *Billboard*, 11 December 1943, 6.
- 133 See *ibid.*; Dollar Value for Program Ratings, *Billboard*, 4 December 1943, 6; Joe Koehler, Radio Circulation Talent Rated, *Billboard*, 23 December 1944, 5, 8.
- 134 John K. Hutchens, Crime Pays—On the Radio, *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 19 March 1944, 16.
- 135 Whodunits Rule Radio Roost, *Variety*, 27 June 1945, 31.
- 136 Data derived from Cosmetic Talent Cost Index, *Billboard* 20 July 1946, 12.
- 137 George Rosen: Low Cost Radio in Big Payoff, *Variety*, 25 May 1949, 1.
- 138 Ibid., 1, 34.
- 139 Pix-Air Reapproachment Due, 12.
- 140 Picture-Packin' Papas Mad, *Variety*, 23 February 1944, 1, 18.
- 141 Pix-Air Reapproachment Due, 12.
- 142 Ibid., 12.

- 143 Ibid., 13.
- 144 New Air-Pix Story Deal, *Billboard*, 30 November 1946, 8.
- 145 Ibid., 8, 14.
- 146 Click Air-Pix Deal Seen As Lever for More Pacts, *Billboard*, 1 February 1947, 13.
- 147 Indie Pic Producers Drive for More Cuffo Air Plugs, *Billboard*, 3 May 1947, 12.
- 148 Ibid.
- 149 Indie Pic Producers Drive for More Cuffo Air Plugs, 12.
- 150 Alan Fischler, Film Cuts Hit Air Dramas, *Billboard*, 28 August 1948, 15.
- 151 Ibid.
- 152 Incest was, admittedly, a pretty difficult topic to broach in cinema as well, although *Scarface* (1932), *King's Row* (1942) and *The Strange Affair of Uncle Harry* (1935) were among the notable Hollywood productions that managed to insinuate it.
- 153 Fischler, 15.
- 154 Ibid.
- 155 Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London, 1999), 292.
- 156 That same year saw the introduction of the hour-long syndicated transcription series *MGM Theatre of the Air* (1949–1951), packaged by MGM Radio Attractions, which adapted the studio's screen properties utilizing performers from MGM and other companies. See MGM Heading Toward Boff Wax Profit; May Hit \$1 Mil, *Billboard*, 9 July 1949, 5–8; MGM Toes the AM Rubber, Winds Up, and Here Comes 'At Ole Production Pitch, *Billboard*, 22 October 1949, 9–10; Jack Gould, Ecomium and Rebuke, *New York Times*, 22 January 1950, 89; MGM Program Line-Up Finalized By Mutual, *Billboard*, 17 November 1951, 5; and MBS-MGM Radio Attractions Rift Over Renewal Terms Widen, *Billboard*, 8 November 1952, 6. As noted earlier, *Hollywood Sound Stage* and *Stars in the Air*, also introduced in the early 1950s, were spin-offs from and continuations of *Screen Guild Theatre*.
- 157 The programme performed well in the ratings—for example, coming 5th (with 6.5%) in the evening Nielsen ratings for the week of 1–7 July 1951, and 7th (with 5.7%) for 15–21 July 1951, 3rd (with 6.2%) for 1951 July 28–August 4. (National Nielsen ratings Top Radio Programs, *Broadcasting*, 13 August 1951, 84; National Nielsen ratings Top Radio Programs, *Broadcasting*, 3 September 1951, 70; and National Nielsen ratings Top Radio Programs, *Broadcasting*, 10 September 1951, 44).
- 158 For a discussion of the paradoxes of authorship in one episode of this series, see Peter Lehman, 'Tonight your director is John Ford': the strange journey of *Stagecoach* from screen to radio, in: Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (eds), *Play It Again, Sam: retakes on remakes* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London, 1998), 293–309.
- 159 The networks created successful television versions of *Lux Radio Theatre* (as *Lux Video Theatre*, 1950–1957, then *Lux Playhouse*, 1958–1959) and *Screen Directors' Playhouse* (1955–1956). While attracting such notable directors as John Ford, Jacques Tourneur and Frank Borzage, the latter presented original material rather than movie adaptations. *Lux Video Theatre* started out in a similar vein,

- but film adaptations began to predominate from 1954–1957, including renditions of *Double Indemnity* (16 December 1954), *Sunset Boulevard* (6 January 1955), *Casablanca* (3 March 1955) and *Mildred Pierce* (20 September 1956).
- 160 For consideration of relations between the cinema and television industries during this period, see Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: the studio system in the fifties* (Austin, TX, 1994).

Frank Krutnik is Reader in Film Studies and Head of Film at the University of Sussex. He has published the books *In a Lonely Street: film noir, genre, masculinity* (1991), *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (with Steve Neale, 1990) and *Inventing Jerry Lewis* (2000) and has co-edited *Un-American Hollywood: politics and film in the blacklist era* (2008). He is currently working on a new book on radio noir.
