Preface

The importance of films in the cultural and social life of both Britain and the United States has long been recognized. Only recently has the equally significant role of radio in both countries begun to be explored in detail, even though as early as 1939 Basil Maine wrote in *The BBC and Its Audience*: 'Of the external forms that are helping to shape human life and behaviour, none I should say is more ubiquitous and permeating than radio'. What has been almost entirely overlooked is the symbiotic relationship that developed between the two media in their heyday. That is the subject of the present book. It covers the period from the 1920s when radio emerged as a major cultural force to 25 November 1960 which has been retrospectively dubbed 'the day radio drama died' in the United States though not in Britain. It was on that date that CBS simultaneously cancelled its four remaining radio soap operas, effectively completing the process by which television had been gradually supplanting radio during the 1950s, taking over comedy and dramatic shows and performers wholesale and leaving the radio networks only with news and music. Although radio survived in Britain more or less intact, by 1960 it too had taken second place to television as the prime domestic medium.

The book begins by analysing the very different relationships between cinema and radio that emerged in Britain and the United States. It moves on to examine the ways in which cinema adapted radio programmes in the fields of comedy and detective fiction and then how radio dramatized films. There are chapters on the radio studio as a performance space and the role of film and radio in politics and war. The book ends with a look in detail at the ways in which the two media have dealt with three popular fictional characters, the Scarlet Pimpernel, Tarzan and Sherlock Holmes.

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Jeffrey Richards