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Included in this issue! - The updated RHAC tape catalog index, showing program names and all of their reel number locations. See other catalog references on our web site.

NOVELS TO NETWORK

by Jack French © 2006

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This topic was the subject of a presentation by the author at the 2006 FOTR Convention in Newark, however this is the first time it has appeared in print.]

There are over a hundred books whose main characters eventually got their own network radio show. Most of them were novels, some of them were non-fiction. Most of us can name several OTR characters who began on the printed page: Renfrew of the Mounted, Sam Spade, Nick and Nora Charles, Perry Mason, Hopalong Cassidy, Dr. Kildaire, The Wizard of Oz, Ellery Queen, Bulldog Drummond, Police Woman, Sherlock Holmes and Lassie. And in addition, radio shows were based upon the stories of Damon Runyon as well as two non-fiction books: 20,000 Years in Sing Sing and The FBI in Peace and War.

While it would be impossible to discuss in one article the history of all these radio shows and the books in which they originated, I would like to take a dozen examples of this "novel to network" process and set forth some factual background on how each one developed.

One of the oldest books (other than the Bible, of course) to become a radio program was DAVID HARUM written by Edward Noyes Westcott, a banker and author in Syracuse, NY. This novel was

first published in 1898, a few months after the author's death at age 52. DAVID HARUM was a shrewd, humorous country banker, much like his creator. Time Magazine in 1942 voted this book to be one of the 50 most influential American books. The radio show, DAVID HARUM, ran from 1936 to 1943 and then from 1947 to 1951, alternating between NBC, CBS, and Mutual. It wasn't supposed to be a soap opera, but like "One Man's Family" it came pretty close.

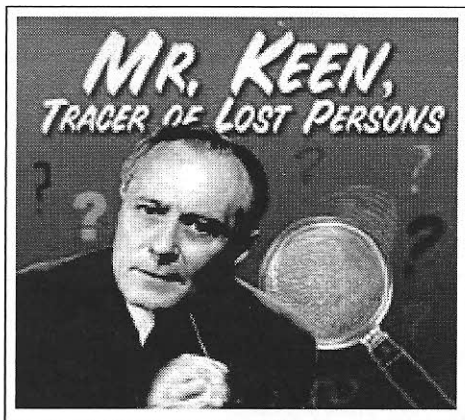
ABIE'S IRISH ROSE was written by Anne Nichols, first as a Broadway play in 1922. Nichols would go on to write eight plays in her lifetime (she died in 1966) but none of them ever approached the success of ABIE'S IRISH ROSE. This play had a total of 2327 performances, running five years, making it the longest running Broadway show for that era. Paramount made it into a motion picture in 1927 and then Anne Nichols rewrote it as a novel, which also did well. However the radio version was only a lukewarm success; NBC aired this comedy-drama weekly for two years, 1942-44.

Regarding soap operas, one of the longest running ones on radio began in a 1923 novel. Olive Higgins Prouty wrote many novels (General Manager, The Fifth Wheel, Bobbie) but her greatest commercial success was STELLA DALLAS. The large sales of the book propelled STELLA onto the Broadway stage in 1924 and the silver screen in 1925 with a Samuel Goldwyn film. It starred Belle Bennett as "Stella." In 1937 Goldwyn filmed it
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again, this time with Barbara Stanwyck and Ann Shirley as mother and daughter. Both actresses received Academy Award nominations for their work in this film.

The publicity prompted Frank and Anne Hummert to take the name STELLA DALLAS for a soap opera which they debuted in 1938. Jim Cox believes that Anne Elstner won the audition for the title lead because she sounded the most like Barbara Stanwyck. Prouty was outraged at the radio soap opera produced without her authorization and she fought to keep it off the air. But apparently the Hummert's lawyers were better than hers and the series remained on network radio for 18 years.

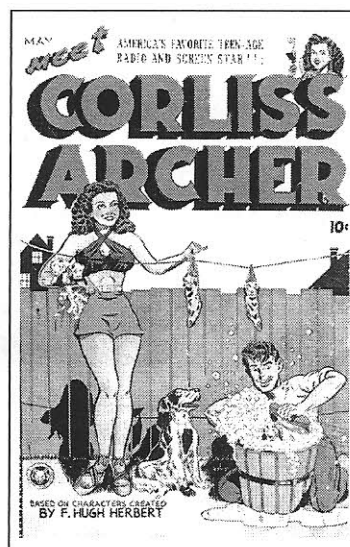
The radio series bore little resemblance to the novel or the movie. However every episode mentioned Prouty by name as the creator, which was true, and also mentioned that Anne Hummert wrote every script, which was false. While Anne and her husband certainly supervised the script writing, neither one of them actually wrote a script. They had a virtual factory of ghost writers to do for STELLA DALLAS what they did for the dozens of Hummert programs.



One of the longest running detective shows on network radio was based upon a hero in a book nobody ever heard of, written by an author nobody knows today. The writer was Robert W., Chambers and he wrote several, now forgotten, romantic novels about the turn of the century. His "The Tracer of Lost Persons" was published in 1906 which told of the exploits of Westrel Keen, an investigator with a huge office and large staff. In this book, he does not solve mysteries or find criminals, but rather locates lovely women who are being sought as wives for rich bachelors. While most of his accomplishments are not spectacular, in one of the chapters a man, who hires Mr. Keen, is in love with an Egyptian mummy princess. Keen performs some incantations, brings her to life, the mixed pair live

happily ever after. Westrel Keen dropped his first name when he came to radio in October 1937 and instead of dozens of assistants, he only had one, Clancy. This series ran until 1955, going through dozens of different sponsors. Despite its popularity, few of its listeners knew that the show's theme song, "Someday I'll Find You" was a romantic love song, composed by British playwright, Noel Coward, for his 1930 stage comedy, "Private Lives." "Someday I'll find you.... moonlight behind you, etc."

Despite its longevity, it had the same two leads for virtually the entire run: Mr. Keen was Bennett Kilpack and Mike Clancy was Jimmy Kelly. While it was still broadcasting in the 50s, Bob & Ray parodied the show under the revised title: "Mr. Trace, Keener Than Most Persons."



It's hard to believe that Corliss Archer was created by an Austrian-born writer who was educated at the University of London, and who achieved fame in the U.S. as a playwright, screen writer, and director. He was Fredrick Hugh Herbert who wrote nine Broadway plays, most of them very successful. "The Moon is Blue" ran for 924 performances and then became a popular movie. "Sitting Pretty" won the Writers Guild Award for best American comedy. In Hollywood, Herbert wrote the screen plays for "Dark Command," "Melody Ranch" and about a dozen others, some of which he directed.

In 1942 he began writing a series of humorous short stories, based on the antics of his two teen-age daughters, which were later collected into a book called MEET CORLISS ARCHER. Corliss Archer made her debut on network radio in January 1943 on CBS and two months later "Kiss and Tell" (with Corliss the leading character) opened on Broadway.

It was a big hit and would run for 956 performances.

While the play was still running, the film version was released in 1945 with Shirley Temple as Corliss. It made a bundle at the box office and resulted in a 1949 sequel, "A Kiss for Corliss." As a historical footnote, it was Shirley Temple's last film. But the radio version continued on with reasonably good ratings for 13 years, finally ending in September 1956. Although Herbert's two daughters both wanted to play the lead in the radio series, cooler heads prevailed and the role was filled by accomplished radio actresses. Although three different ones played Corliss, most of us remember Janet Waldo, with her long-suffering boy friend, Dexter, played by Sam Edwards.



Melvin Douglas as the Lone Wolf

While he wasn't as popular on radio as he had been in books and the movies, *THE LONE WOLF*, was still quite a character. He was created by Louis Joseph Vance, an American writer born in 1879, and a writer of romantic pot-boilers in the early 1900s. He had written about a half dozen adventure novels before he made his mark in fiction with *THE LONE WOLF*, which was published in 1914. As Vance portrayed him in his first novel, *THE LONE WOLF* was a British orphan, raised in Paris where he was given the name Marcel Troyon. He grew up as a bi-lingual petty thief, graduated to gentleman cat burglar (think Cary Grant in "To Catch a Thief") and then came to the U.S. under the assumed name of Michael Lanyard. His nickname of *THE LONE WOLF* had been bestowed on him by a French news reporter.

The success of the character prompted Vance to write three more *LONE WOLF* novels before he died in December 1933 in an astonishing manner that far exceeded any tragic fictional deaths in his books. His body was found in his apartment sitting in his living room chair. His upper torso and the top half of the chair had been charred by fire, but there

was no other evidence of flames in the room. While he was a drinker and smoker, both were inconclusive in contributing to his horrible death. While the coroner's report was vague, the newspapers of the day called the incident "spontaneous combustion."

From 1935 to 1949 fourteen films starring *THE LONE WOLF* were produced by Hollywood; in the first two he was a jewel thief, and the remaining ones he switched to law abiding citizen. He was played by Melvin Douglas, later Warren Williams, and finally Gerald Mohr. Mohr had also played *THE LONE WOLF* in the short-lived Mutual radio series, which ran from June 1948 to January 1949... in which he was depicted as a reformed thief and a dashing, debonair detective, over whom young women gushed.

SCATTERGOOD BAINES, the homespun philosopher with an unusual first name, was a fictional operator of a small town hardware store who was created in 1915 by Clarence Budington Kelland. (Why do so many authors use all three names?) Kelland wrote a series of magazine stories about Scattergood, an elderly, chubby fellow who solved everybody's problems in the New England town of Cold River. Fifteen of these stories were collected into book form in 1940 under the title "Scattergood Baines Returns." It may have been published to cash in on the popularity of the radio show, which had begun in 1937 and would run on CBS for five years as a 15 minute soap opera with Jess Pugh in the lead. CBS canceled the show in 1942 but Mutual brought it back in 1949 as a 30 minute comedy drama. Wendell Holmes played Scattergood for the 8 months before Mutual took it off the air.

There were at least three network radio shows that had an Asian character in the lead, two were heroes and the third was a Mandarin prince of evil, who was actually the first one to appear in print. *FU MANCHU* was the creation of a low-level British clerk and self-taught writer who went on to become the best selling novelist since Charles Dickens. Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward, under the pen-name of Sax Rohmer, started in the pulp magazines but went on to write 30 novels in his lifetime, most of them about *FU MANCHU*. Rohmer was 30 years old when his first novel about this arch criminal was released in 1913 and his last book, "Re-Enter Fu Manchu" came out in 1957, two years before he died at the age of 76. His books sold very well in the Great Britain and the U.S. and were made into

movies, including "The Mask of Fu Manchu" starring Boris Karloff, with Myrna Loy as his evil daughter. A total of nine motion pictures were made about this Chinese arch criminal.

The radio versions were not very successful... possibly because the villain was always more interesting than the law enforcement people trying to stop his evil plans. It ran for seven months 1932-33 as part of the Collier Hour. (As was customary in those days, Rohmer's novels were serialized in Colliers before the book was released.) CBS brought the character back to radio in 1939 under the title "The Shadow of Fu Manchu" for 39 episodes, ending in August 1939. Walter Connolly played the lead in both series, with Hanley Stafford and Gale Gordon as the good guys chasing him around the globe.



The Chinese detective, Charlie Chan, made his first appearance in 1925 in a serialized novel by Earl Derr Biggers, and was partially a response to contradict the "Yellow Peril" of the evil Asian villains which Sax Rohmer and many pulp writers were promoting. Biggers, born in Ohio and educated at Harvard, was a modestly paid drama critic in the Boston area when he turned to mystery-comedy fiction. Moving to New York, he wrote plays, novels, and short stories in the 1920s. CHARLIE CHAN, a Chinese police detective in Hawaii, first appeared in "House Without A Key" which became a best-seller and was made into a movie in 1926. Thereafter, Biggers, who was in failing health, wrote one CHARLIE CHAN novel a year, a total of six before his death at age 43. All of them were made into motion pictures. But the character was so popular, 20th Century Fox continued to produce movies with Charlie Chan in the lead, totaling 28 of them by 1942. Later Monogram Pictures got the rights and then released 17 additional films. Of course, all the royalties for these were going to the

Biggers' estate; he had died in 1933.

One might assume that such a popular character in novels, magazines, and movies would be a success on radio, but this was not the case. NBC debuted CHARLIE CHAN in December 1932 and canceled it after six months. Mutual resurrected the series in 1937, but again it only lasted half a year. ABC next aired the adventures of this Chinese detective, beginning in June 1944 with Ed Begley in the title role. It had average ratings and after three years ABC gave it to Mutual in August 1947, but they canceled it before it ran a year. Many years later, it was revived "Down Under" with an Australian cast.

The last in our trio of Asian book characters to come to radio was a Japanese, Mr. I. A. Moto, who was created by John P. Marquand. This author was born in Delaware, and educated at Harvard, arriving there five years after Biggers graduated. After service in the First World War, Marquand began as a magazine story writer and worked his way up to full-length novels.

We don't know if the success of CHARLIE CHAN caused him to create his own Asian crime solver, but in 1935 his novel, "Your Turn, Mr. Moto." was published. Moto was not a detective. However, he was a secret agent for the Japanese government. This first book sold well enough for Marquand to write five more MR. MOTO novels, most taking place in China. Beginning in 1937, 20th Century Fox produced eight films of MR. MOTO, which had the unlikely casting of Peter Lorre in the lead, a Hungarian born actor who learned film acting during seven years work in Switzerland.

While Marquand enjoyed the commercial success of MOTO, he did not rest on his laurels. He wrote several serious novels, two of which were produced as Broadway plays, and one of them, "The Late George Apley" won the 1938 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Obviously books with Japanese heroes did not sell well after Pearl Harbor so MR. MOTO had to hibernate during WW II. He would not reappear until 1957 when "The Last of Mr. Moto" novel was published.

By that time, MR. MOTO had already arrived on radio, aired for only 5 months and was canceled in October 1951. In this NBC series, James Monks played MOTO and he was not a secret agent, but an international investigator, sometimes fighting Communists and former Nazis.

Beginning in the late 1930s, Eric Hodgins, a

managing editor at Fortune Magazine in NYC, wrote several full length books, usually on finance, aviation, and management techniques, but his 1946 book was comedy fiction. It was called "MR BLANDINGS BUILDS HIS DREAM HOUSE" and it was based upon all the things that can go wrong when a NY businessman and his family move to the country.... in Connecticut.

The book became a best-seller and his agent sold the movie rights to RKO. The movie came out in 1948 and starred Cary Grant and Myrna Loy as the hapless couple trying vainly to renovate a dilapidated dwelling in a remote rural area... In the supporting cast, as Mr. Blandings' assistant was OTR star Lureen Tuttle. This movie did well at the box office and the screenplay was nominated for a Writers' Guild Award as Best Comedy.

Cary Grant reprised his role on Lux Radio Theatre in Oct 1949; however Mrs. Blandings was played by Irene Dunn. Less than a year later, Grant got to do a radio version again, this time on Screen Director's Playhouse. The third of his five real-life wives, Betsy Drake, whom Grant had just married a few months prior, played Mrs. Blandings.

Someone at NBC must have been impressed with this real-life pairing because they started negotiations with Grant and Drake to do a radio series based on the book and the movie. Meanwhile, author Hodgins wrote a sequel, "Blandings Way" which became a Book of the Month Selection in October 1950. Under the shortened title of MR AND MRS. BLANDINGS', the radio series went on the air in January 1951. It had mediocre success and six months later, NBC canceled it. Of course a major film star like Cary Grant would hardly be expected to stay with a weekly series earning the pittance radio paid in those days.



Although it's hard to believe, Lucille Ball's radio sitcom MY FAVORITE HUSBAND, was based on a book of stories about a high society couple living outside of New York City. The book, written by Isabel Scott Rorick in 1940, was entitled: "Mr. and

Mrs. Cugat; the Record of a Happy Marriage." It told of a banker bachelor, George Cugat, who married preppy debutante, Mary Elizabeth Elliot, and the merry antics that ensued. The book was so successful it went through eleven additional printings in the two years after its debut. In 1945 Rorick came out with a sequel, "Outside Eden," in which George and Liz Cugat continued their zany activities, again sprinkled with lots of alcohol consumption and mild sexiness that had characterized the first book.

Harry Hackerman, CBS head of radio programming, read the books in the late 40s. He decided the couple described in it would be a good vehicle for a radio show for Lucille Ball. She was looking for a radio comedy and agreed to do the show Hackerman proposed. However she was determined that her husband, Desi Arnaz, portray the co-lead. CBS refused, saying he would not be believable as her radio husband. So they cast Richard Denning as Mr. Cugat and the series debuted in July 1948. Lucy played Liz Cugat but the show did not do well in the ratings initially.

The script doctors, led by writer-producer Jess Oppenheimer, came in and "fixed it." The last name of the couple was changed to "Cooper"; George's salary was made more modest so Liz could complain about money, and two additional characters were added, Gale Gordon as George's boss and Bea Benaderet as the boss' wife. The series got much better ratings under this format and by 1950, CBS wanted to convert it into a television series. Lucy agreed only if Desi played the husband, but CBS refused. Lucy and Desi went on tour during their down time and proved that audiences would accept, and like, them as a married couple. CBS was still unconvinced. So Lucy and Desi recorded one radio audition of "I Love Lucy." It did not impress CBS. So the couple shot an "I Love Lucy" TV pilot with their own money. After seeing it, CBS executives finally agreed to Desi in the role. The TV show began in October 1951, ran ten years with the highest ratings, and has been in syndication ever since.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jack French, an OTR historian in Virginia, has received the Stanich Award and the Agatha Award for Best Non-Fiction for his book, "PRIVATE EYELASHES: Radio's Lady Detectives." It is available from his publisher at www.bearmanormedia.com