1 Beauty, Celebrity, and Power in Two Cultures

These famous are symptomatic and symbolic, the large-screen projection of those human possibilities a culture believes are the most fascinating and perhaps useful for its survival.

Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*[1]

Only after Valentino could a blonde leading lady accept and return the ardent kisses of a screen lover with dark coloring.

Emily Leider, *Dark Lover: The Life and Death of Rudolph Valentino*[2]

ONLY AFTER DOLORES DEL RÍO could a blond leading man make passionate love on the Hollywood screen to a dark female lover. She herself believed that she had established a new phenotype for female beauty in Hollywood—a dark-haired, dark-eyed, dark-skinned ideal—to match that established for men by Rudolph Valentino. Yet on arrival in California in 1925, she agonized over her brunette loveliness, faced with the "fairy-tale" stars with blonde hair and blue eyes.[3] At the same time she became a celebrity in the United States, she became a source of national pride for Mexico. On the day of his assassination in 1928, former Mexican President and President-Elect Alvaro Obregón asked for a showing of her film *Ramona* that evening, or so the London press claimed. The pleasure was denied him when he was shot and killed by a religious fanatic at a political luncheon. Later she became one of the country's great divas when she returned and participated in its Golden Age of cinema.

"The female Valentino." Centro de Estudios de Historia de México CARSO.
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Who was this extraordinary woman, and what were the qualities that made her compelling to so many? How was this woman able to appeal so completely to two nations and two cultures, simultaneously gaining international fame?

Is it possible that, as Leo Braudy said of celebrated individuals, she was "symptomatic and symbolic" of her times and her places, was "fascinating" to those who saw her films and followed her life story (both the real and created), and found her public persona somehow "useful?"[4] She began her career in the post–World War I United States; renown and wealth followed almost immediately, if not always happiness. She seemed to provide on the screen and in her private life a vision of "human possibilities" that would begin to shift important markers of racial and ethnic division within U.S. society. Later she returned to Mexico, where again she seemed to provide more "projections" useful to a society still in transition after its bloody revolution of 1910–1920.

The Mexican actress Dolores del Río was the first major Latina crossover star in Hollywood, and thus subject to two cultures, rather than the single one envisioned by Braudy's quotation. Departing the economic and social changes of her home country that followed its violent civil war, 1910–1920, in which dictator Porfirio Díaz was overthrown by a cross-class alliance that included peasants bent on land reform and other revolutionaries who threatened and then in fact affected and diminished the position of the upper class, she arrived in Los Angeles in 1925. Under the sponsorship of director Edwin Carewe, she very quickly rose to the height of stardom and personal wealth and remained both popular and employed for over a decade. When good roles diminished and her personal life took a turbulent and unexpected turn in the early 1940s, she returned to Mexico to join an artistic and literary renaissance that was already flourishing. There she was able to take more control over her life, in both personal and professional aspects, and went on to become one of the most celebrated actresses in that nation's history and a key participant in Mexican film's Golden Age. This progression toward autonomy and personal control had been going on for a long time, and interpretations that see her as a largely passive victim of the Hollywood milieu or of the men in her life are surely mistaken. She was sometimes disappointed or distressed even to the point of illness, setbacks she was able to overcome though with difficulty. Yet del Río, at least from the early 1930s on, was aware of her interests and took an active part in

charting her own course. Her success at doing so varied over time, but she was never simply a tool for powerful men.

A number of issues arise in looking at her life and career, but by far the one most commonly and notoriously associated with her is that of her physical beauty. Contemporaries as well as later viewers of her photographs and films reacted with dazzled admiration. Her friends and fellow great foreign beauties in Hollywood, Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, considered her the most beautiful of all. Dietrich even called her "the most beautiful woman who ever set foot in Hollywood."[5] Other closely related themes have to do with the questions of gender and relationships with men, power, sexuality, race, age, and social position. These things played out in various concrete ways: the creation of an image (she started in Hollywood, after all); the corporeal creation of beauty, ranging from cosmetics and hairstyles to plastic surgery; and the re-creation of her bodily actions, that is, her voice, her movements, her acting. As with most Hollywood stars, then and now, among her roles was her own self-creation. Within that self-creation, major questions emerge: How much of what resulted was her own choice or was indeed a part of her "real" self, whatever that might mean, and what was imposed or forced on her, either by mentors or the market or both?

However difficult it may be to separate the woman Dolores del Río from the Hollywood creation and then later from her film images in Mexico, she was nevertheless a real human being with a background, a personality, a will. Joanne Hershfield, in her fascinating analysis of del Río's films, has argued: "A movie star has no 'personal identity' (even though the person who inhabits the star's body may claim such an identity). In other words, she is a figure composed of a presence and a set of discourses that symbolize an *iconic* identity."[6] Although I understand Hershfield's point and admire her book on del Río, I cannot accept it as an exclusive guide in this work. Such a view robs the individual of both agency and humanity. Rather, the actual person is in continuing interaction with the constructed image—including her publicity and her acting roles—but nevertheless continues to be a living, breathing individual. It is in the neighborhood of the interaction between the individual and the constructed image that I have looked to find the biography of this celebrated woman.

Del Río's beauty is sometimes seen as making her a victim and a commodity, but her beauty, charm, talent, and energy gave her enormous power

to shape her own fate as well, and she realized this power more fully over time. Psychologist Rollo May defines *power* as "the ability to cause or prevent change," and he goes on to say that in psychology, "power means the ability to affect, to influence, and to change other persons (or oneself)." Further, he considers personal power as "self-realization and self-actualization."[7] Del Río was able to be powerful in the ways that May suggests. Moreover, much of her power came precisely from her beauty. One definition of beauty is "the quality that gives pleasure to the mind and senses and is associated with such properties as harmony of form or color, excellence of artistry, truthfulness, and originality."[8] Yet another sees it as "the quality of being very pleasing, as in form, color, etc.," or in another choice, "good looks."[9] Most definitions of female beauty equate it with sexual attractiveness.[10] In particular, beauty seems to be associated with the female face and body, and it is no surprise that Dolores's male biographers often include the word "face" in their titles.[11] In this particular case, images of del Río were ubiquitous in both countries for decades, and whether in person or on the screen or in still photographs or painted portraits, she was certainly sexually appealing. Yet her popularity—and even more important, her career—extended throughout her lifetime, far beyond the age at which most experts would believe that this erotic attraction was the only (or even the major) source of her power. In this case, perhaps, her beauty, though still physical, extended into areas associated more with manner and way of being—and, certainly, with memories and nostalgia for the young Dolores in those who had seen her work years earlier or those who saw these images replayed in various formats in later decades. She was a celebrity in both countries within months of her arrival in Hollywood, and though her fame and popularity waxed and waned, she remained one until her death. Yet the nature of this celebrity differed significantly north and south of the border.

Moreover, the perception of her beauty was enhanced by her very celebrity, defined here as fame or the quality of being well known across a large public. Celebrity is rarely earned simply because one is "great and talented and virtuous" or even very, very beautiful; it is almost always accompanied by a "publicity apparatus" and a great deal of luck.[12] Celebrity was a major key to certain kinds of power that del Río achieved, beyond the power that beauty carries to those who are attracted by or enamored of that quality. Celebrity from her publicity and her films brought far more attention—indeed, international notice—to Dolores than had she exerted that power

only with others who knew her personally, though this aspect of power was certainly important to her throughout her life and career. Yet celebrity had an additional economic advantage: it made her projects bankable, and she was able to use her power in the realm of filmmaking to bring people of talent into her endeavors, particularly in Mexico.

In this case, her very beauty and social class diminished the significance of her Mexican background and her somewhat darker rather than lighter skin, and a good publicity machine and good fortune in her early directors and roles helped a great deal.[13] Her success, however, was not inevitable, and its achievement was, for her, personally costly. Though her ability and resolve increased as she grew older, her marketability in U.S. films declined. This phenomenon had far more to do with age than race. It also had to do, to some degree, with a reaction against foreign stars, both male and female. Still, she seems to have known from her midtwenties onward that she did not need a male mentor, though at that time she still seems to have wanted a protective husband. She always recognized and appreciated working with talented and perceptive directors. When she returned to Mexico in the 1940s, in her late thirties and in considerable emotional distress, she was paradoxically both alone and in control.

Gender is significant throughout her life. She was able to engage in behaviors not initially acceptable for young women of her social class in Mexico—working as an actress for more than fifty years, making her own money, divorcing two husbands—but she did not engage in overt political activity as a rule. The changes she may have inspired in Mexico in regard to women's roles had more to do with her example, particularly as she achieved increasing autonomy in her personal life and her professional endeavors. During the 1920s, in Hollywood, she was an almost quintessential model for the "chica moderna," working, wearing cloche hats and shorter skirts, and eventually cutting her long hair into a more fashionable bob.[14] Although it would be hard to tell to what degree acceptance of these styles in Mexico had to do with her, her publicity photos showed her as a very elegant version of a modern young Mexican woman with her own money, and it seems likely that she was emulated as well as envied. Though she came into criticism for breaking from tradition, particularly among the high upper class to which her first husband's family belonged, it may be that she also was an example to other women of what was possible. Criticism of her in Mexico, strongest when she was first in Holly-

Del Río as a model for 1920s Mexican women. CEHM CARSO.

wood, was no doubt partly based on envy of the freedom and renown that she had achieved.

The issue of age itself is in dispute, and she tried to conceal her actual birthdate from the beginning of her Hollywood career. At that time, the perception was that an actress could count on being attractive to audiences only through her midtwenties. She insisted from her arrival in California that she had been born on August 3, 1906, which would have made her barely

fifteen at the time of her wedding in 1921 and nineteen at the beginning of her film career. She was, in fact, born in 1904 and celebrated her twenty-first birthday just before she arrived in Los Angeles.

By the time she reached the claimed age of twenty-four (actually twenty-six) and was married to her second husband, Cedric Gibbons, there were speculations in the press that she was "washed up." She was already saying that she was hopeful her career might last three or four years longer.[15] It lasted, in fact, almost until her death, but by no means always in Hollywood.

Power is also an important theme in her life story. Her extreme youth at the time of her first marriage (whether she was fifteen or seventeen) relative to the age of her spouse, Jaime Martínez del Río, who was about two decades her senior and from a wealthier and more prominent family, indicated an initial, very significant power differential. When she and her husband were brought to California by Edwin Carewe, the director was eager to take over her life along with her career, and conflicts inevitably developed. The story that then unfolded was very different from what Jaime, Dolores, and Carewe himself initially envisioned, and power shifted.

Other issues arise from context, particularly those of celebrity and race. These important factors were clearly entwined in Dolores's life story. The growth of the mass-market press, both newspapers and magazines, taking off in the latter part of the nineteenth century, led to the "development of celebrity journalism as a specific genre."[16] Immediately upon arrival in Hollywood, Dolores became a person of enormous interest in this new type of reporting, and Hollywood, of course, was a perfect venue for fostering celebrity and celebrities. The possibility of placing stories that would lead to the fame and therefore employability of their protégés gave directors, studio heads, and others involved in film production an incentive to employ a new breed of journalists—press agents—operating from outside newspapers and magazines themselves. Early on, Dolores had a particularly effective one, Harry D. Wilson. He worked with her from the moment she arrived in Hollywood, and he spun stories that would show her in what he felt was a favorable light and keep her before the public. Enormous interest in the famous led to the emergence of another group of journalists working for newspapers and magazines who specialized in following film stars, especially those who were beginning to enjoy wide popularity as they appeared on the silver screen. Some of these were gossip columnists; others produced stories for the society pages; and some, of course, were film

critics. They focused on del Río from her earliest days in the United States. The *Los Angeles Times* alone covered her extensively, with 101 mentions of appearances in that first year in Hollywood (August 25, 1925–August 25, 1926) and 221 in the subsequent year (August 25, 1926–August 25, 1927). Even the relatively stodgy *New York Times*, which focused more on actors and actresses from the theater than on Hollywood stars, mentioned her five times in her first year in the United States and fifty-seven times in the second.[17] She began to appear as a specifically Mexican celebrity just over a month after arrival, in a *Los Angeles Times* layout of caricatures of prominent Mexicans including President Plutarco Elías Calles. She was the only woman.[18] She had not yet appeared in a film. Hollywood reporters covered her constantly throughout her career, even after she returned more or less permanently to Mexico, among them gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, society writer Grace Kingsley, and feature writer Gladys Hall. Although male writers often mentioned her as well, female journalists took a more consistent and insistent interest. Still, Mexican racial status was ambiguous. It is probable, in my view, that her popularity as a romantic leading lady was enhanced by the tension of being *almost* forbidden. This exoticism was played up more in her Hollywood roles of the 1930s than in those of the 1920s, particularly in the film *Bird of Paradise*.[19]

The case of race is more complex. Hershfield, for example, makes it a major issue, as she discusses the roles in which Dolores was cast, particularly early in her career. However, Hershfield points out that the publicity designed by Wilson and Carewe actually emphasized her "ethnic and racial characteristics" and notes that she was described in *Photoplay*, one of the first movie magazines and certainly the most important at that time, as "the raven-haired, olive-skinned, sinuous-limbed Carmen."[20] This emphasis on the part of Dolores's handlers seems contradictory both to Hershfield's analysis and to their own stress on her as rich and of European descent, but it played into the vision of del Río as exotic and foreign, maybe even, subliminally, a little more appealing because just on the edge of dangerous. Later on, Hershfield sees evidence of the "whitening" of Dolores, still performing exotic roles but looking more and more European. Of course, casting will always depend a great deal on appearance, and in film the actor must appear believable in the role. Only occasionally on the stage, and very occasionally at that, will an actor be cast as a character in which facial features or skin color make her or him implausible. Yet Dolores's very beauty

led producers and directors to seek out or create roles for her in which she would be convincing, and later she herself would do the searching. Far from losing parts because of her race, she found roles were being created for her because of her beauty. Certainly, accounts of Dolores and her success reflected awareness that she was Mexican, but they consistently emphasized her high social status and the wealth of her family and her husband's. Race and ethnicity, in this case, were significantly modified by class.

Hershfield indicates that "feminine beauty in the United States has always been conceived as 'white' beauty," and she searches for an explanation of why women such as Dolores could be acceptable in that context.[21] But the facts reflect that not only was Dolores acceptable, she herself set a new standard of physical appearance and sexual attraction, as Valentino did for male stars, and Carewe almost certainly selected her for this very purpose. In 1930, six years after her first screen appearance, *Photoplay* searched for "the most perfect feminine figure in Hollywood," using a panel of "medical men, artists, designers" as judges. Del Río was "their unanimous selection." Though Hershfield is aware of this assessment, she rejects the explanation that "American celebrities can rise above the color line."[22] In this case, it seems, Dolores not only could but did, if indeed she was ever perceived by U.S. whites as racially other. In yet another *Photoplay* article four years later, when she was thirty, the most eminent fashion photographer of the time, George Hoyningen-Huene, named her as the second most beautiful actress in Hollywood, following only Garbo, stating that, "She wears less makeup than any of the stars I have met, yet her vividness is breathtaking. The bone structure of her head and body is magnificent. Her skin is like ripe fruit. She has sinuous yet artless grace; her face is so perfectly constructed that she can be photographed in any light from any angle. Wherever the light falls, it composes beauty."[23] And the light in photographs of del Río could significantly change the appearance of her skin in her portraits, with the elegance of her apparel and jewelry providing cues to her personal wealth and social status.

She was shifting the definition of *other*, and Carewe—himself of Native American descent and, more than that, raised in close proximity to if not immersed in Native American culture—seems to have selected her specifically to move those lines. Given the associations that many in the United States made between the categories "Mexican" and "Indian," it was a risk.

Certainly, she was seen as exotic, but I find no evidence that she was demeaned or placed in an inferior category in this regard, although some

An early publicity photograph shows lighting and makeup to lighten del Río's skin.
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of her roles are jarringly offensive to twenty-first-century sensibilities in their depiction of gender. The men who encountered her constantly testified to her extraordinary loveliness, and it is clear that many of them fell hopelessly in love with her. Possible notions of her race as manifested physically do not seem to have mattered in terms of male response. Beauty and class trumped any attempts to view her as nonwhite, but the tactics employed by Carewe were dangerous, despite the fact that powerful men were eager to help her and the U.S. public was eager to accept her. Defying the notion that lighter skin was better, in early screen tests and beauty pageants, Carewe and her other handlers dressed her in white, the better to emphasize her dark loveliness. Dolores herself became a kind of social experiment, and in her early years in Hollywood it was she who paid the price emotionally for this audacity. Moving the racial and ethnic lines for acceptable romantic female stars—portrayed more than life-size on the silver screen—was not without its dangers. Though Valentino paved the way for men, his own acceptance was not unequivocal, and she herself was vulnerable to sexual, gender, and racial judgments, occasionally on the printed page or from those viewing her larger-than-life presence on the movie screen.

Race and ethnicity, for del Río, a dazzling Mexican woman, were highly complicated. After all, when she came to Hollywood in 1925 the country was less than eighty years away from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which had given more than half of Mexico's national territory to the United States. In the wake of that agreement, full citizenship of Mexicans in the region acquired seemed to be clear: the treaty itself promised that all Mexican citizens irrespective of race were entitled to the political status of whites. Yet most government officials believed that Mexicans who were predominantly of Indian ancestry should have the same status as detribalized Indians north of the border, leaving them in a liminal status dependent on whether they seemed to be of European ancestry or more indigenous. California and Arizona moved early to disenfranchise Mexicans considered Indian, with only Mexicans of European descent attaining political rights. In any case, many Mexicans, regardless of legal argument, were refused these rights.[24] Even Secretary of Labor James J. Davis admitted the confusions about Mexican race in 1929, at the height of del Río's movie fame. He stated, after years of considering the question of preventing Mexicans from immigrating into the United States, that "The Mexican people are of such a mixed stock and individuals have such a limited knowledge of their racial composition that

it would be impossible for the most learned and experienced ethnologist or anthropologist to classify or determine their racial origin."[25]

Moreover, in the 1920s, when Dolores arrived in California, the issue of Mexican race was being debated in regard to school segregation; in 1927, the year of her first big movie success, the attorney general of California offered the opinion that Mexican students should be classified as Indians, and thus subject to de jure segregation, reiterating this point of view in 1930. By 1931, 85 percent of Mexican students in the California public school system were in segregated facilities.[26] In the 1920s as well, miscegenation—mixing of races—was an issue directly related to del Río's potential success as a female film star performing with white male romantic leads. It was a major theme of discussion, political and otherwise. U.S. congressional representatives John Box and Thomas Jenkins were at that time arguing publicly that Mexicans were already the products of racial mixing among Indians, blacks, and whites, a process they called "mongrelization." According to them, Mexicans on both sides of the border were entirely too casual about interracial liaisons and likely to contribute to continued racial mixing.[27] Yet the issue was almost always framed as a problem of Indian versus white blood, and Mexicans considered to be white were in theory exempt from stigma, social or otherwise. They were nevertheless in a precarious situation. Despite the attention given to these issues by Hollywood censoring agencies, del Río was unusually exempt. As noted by one of the foremost historians of the film world and race, "Even though Dolores Del Rio vehicles like *Wonder Bar* (1934), *I Live for Love* (1935), and *In Caliente* (1935), as well as the trade reviews of them clearly marked the Mexican actress as 'a Latin stage star' paired with white men, no mention is made of such differences in the PCA [Production Code Administration] files on these films."[28] Del Río simply did not trigger the same kinds of racial biases as many other dark-skinned actresses did.

In 1944, five states—Arizona, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia—prohibited "the American Redman" from marrying "Caucasians," though none of the states explicitly named Mexicans as being of a race "separate from whites or Caucasians." An article in the *California Law Review* at the time indicated that it might be possible for Indians to be considered "Mongolian" for purposes of miscegenation, and thus the prohibition might extend to that state as well.[29] Determinations of race were largely made as judgments of physical appearance by the clerks au-

thorizing the unions. Only in 1948 did California begin to issue marriage licenses regardless of race. Until that time, Mexicans hoping to marry those designated white might be denied legal authorization on the basis of miscegenation, though by that date it rarely occurred and Mexicans in California were generally considered to be white. Still, Mexican racial status was ambiguous, liminal, and nervous-making. The case that broke through the legal barrier in California was *Perez* v. *Lippold* (1947), in which Perez was held to be white and Lippold "Negro." Using the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, three judges of the California court found in favor of the couple, while another concurred on the grounds of religious freedom.[30] Yet it was not until 1967 that miscegenation statutes were finally declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.[31] Dolores, with her dark skin, hair, and eyes, was vulnerable. Almost paradoxically, Carewe and Wilson emphasized these characteristics, pushing them as "exotic" and, at least in the case of Wilson, "Spanish." Dolores herself never glossed her ethnicity as Spanish, however, always claiming quite clearly her Mexican nationality.

Social class emerges as another important issue here. Though Dolores was Mexican, she was in many ways much more sophisticated than most Americans, even those of similar economic means. Both her family and that of her spouse were well-to-do. Although they had suffered losses in the Revolution, they still maintained lifestyles that included European tours and homes of beauty and, in the case of the Martínez del Ríos, considerable grandeur. She and Jaime were also both strongly connected in the Mexican artistic world, including a nascent avant-garde that was developing rapidly after the turbulent upheavals of the Revolution and ensuing political changes. It was an era of new social and cultural freedoms and forms. Dolores's ties with artists and writers and others in this creative postrevolutionary movement would be lifelong.

This Mexican cultural and social elite had contacts with the movie business in the United States, and they mingled with some of its leaders. In fact, these connections were pursued by Mexicans, particularly after the economic and social changes of the Revolution impeded their access to the lifestyles that had been supported previously by their control over the land, agriculture, and mining. Hollywood was, after all, in Southern California, close to the Mexican border though a fair distance from Mexico City. Mexican elites were sophisticated and creative; it made sense that

they would be sought out by those in the U.S. movie industry and that they themselves would seek creative space there. Moreover, Mexico constituted a large market for U.S. films in the 1920s and 1930s. In the first few years of the talkies, a number of films were made in two versions, English and another language (often Spanish). Sometimes producers used the same actors for the two productions, depending on language skills. More than one filmmaker in the 1920s searched for a female counterpart to the exotic male actor, Rudolph Valentino, who himself had made dark skin and eyes acceptable in male romantic leads, and Mexico was a good potential source for such a figure. Carewe framed Dolores's possibilities in precisely that light, insisting that she could be the female Valentino. He lured Dolores and her husband to Hollywood, where within a short time she gained enormous popularity. The legend has it that she was reluctant; the evidence shows that she welcomed the opportunity and took full advantage of it.

Whether or not Dolores sought out a career or fame, she later regarded the move as a liberation. According to her, "it was there, in Hollywood, that I began my life. That is to say, I found myself." She was beginning to sense her own power. As she stated, she followed a "*Straight Line*, driven by a single desire . . . to become known Worldwide as the *Most Important Actress of Mexico*."[32]

There are also issues of sexuality surrounding her story. Rumors still abound in Mexico that her first two husbands were gay. What is certain is that she never had children and was therefore unencumbered in her career and never faced the changes to her body that pregnancy would have caused. Whatever the nature of her own sexual life, it is also clear that she furthered the fantasies of both those who knew her and those who saw her on the screen. Certainly she experienced sexual tension with powerful men in the entertainment industry on both sides of the border. Throughout her Hollywood and Mexican careers, she was followed by rumors of her affairs with men as well as women, the men including some of the most prominent actors, directors, and artists of her time, the women including Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, and Frida Kahlo. Whether or not these rumors were true, more than one man who fell in love with her screen image later became her lover. Yet many of the claims and gossip perhaps have to do with wishful thinking, or perhaps even wishful bragging. Moreover, despite all the rumors, she retained a reputation as a lady—again, perhaps, a class-based judgment—unlike her less-fortunate fellow Mexican, Lupe Vélez, whose unwanted pregnancy led her to commit suicide.[33] In any event,

Dolores finally married for a third time, but not until 1959. At that time, she was fifty-five years old, and she and her third husband, Lewis Riley, had been companions for more than a decade.

The problems of beauty and sexuality lead directly to issues of the body. There are a number of questions that revolve around Dolores and her physical being. Among them are pregnancy and motherhood, or in this case their absence; use of cosmetics, costumes, and other appearance-altering devices; and plastic surgery. Clothes and hairstyles were other constant concerns. Of course, each role required a particular persona, an altered appearance. Interestingly, her earliest publicity stills showed her as sophisticated, elegantly dressed, her hair pulled back tightly to emphasize the extraordinary symmetry of her face and her enormous eyes. The poses were tightly controlled, almost never showing her in any kind of movement. Yet her movie stills, reflecting her casting, often show her as young, open, outgoing, animated, and by no means upper-class. In her publicity coverage, balancing her film roles, emphasis on her sophistication was echoed by constant references to her own high social status, the wealth of her family, and her trips to Europe.

She also refuted the U.S. (not to mention European) idea of what most Mexicans were like. She distanced herself from Mexicans who were lower-class and unruly, such as those who had fought in the Revolution—and some of these people were actually in Hollywood—or those who had earlier protested the U.S. takeover of California.[34] Although she occasionally was shown dressed in the stereotypical flamenco costume, most of these photographs are from the time when she was dancing in Mexico, before she came to Hollywood. An exception was in her first film, *Joanna*, in 1925, when she appeared cavorting with a Spanish shawl. Even here, however, she was wearing a high-style European gown, elegant jewelry, and glamorous high-heeled shoes. She also had a fiery Latin role in the *Loves of Carmen* in 1927, but the still photographs continued to emphasize her sophisticated Europeanness and the publicity her upper-class status. Never, in her early years in Hollywood, was she portrayed as a Mexican peasant woman, though she played a very romanticized version of a California mixed-race orphan—of an indigenous mother and a European father raised in a Spanish family—in *Ramona*, one of her most popular portrayals. But *Ramona* followed her role as a French innkeeper's daughter in *What Price Glory?* and as a Russian peasant in *Revenge* and *Resurrection*. Specifically, roles as

explicitly "Indian," in both Mexican and U.S. films, came mostly after she returned to Mexico to live.

In terms of cosmetics, she always emphasized her eyes, which were extraordinarily large and dark. David Román says that she was concerned about her dark skin and Indian features as a child, and that she had done her best to use powders to make herself look lighter.[35] If she did, she was following in the footsteps of Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, who used the same technique on his dark skin for his portraits, perhaps to impress his Mexican contemporaries and his European and U.S. counterparts. It is also possible that her still photographs were altered to make her skin look lighter. Indianness, however beautiful it might have been in the eyes of others, was not pleasing to her own high class in Mexican society, and it obviously had to be handled carefully, regardless of Carewe's desires, in the United States.

Yet another controversial issue is plastic surgery. This profession was taking hold rapidly in the United States in the 1920s, as the medical techniques developed in World War I for reconstruction of faces was refined and commercialized.[36] If, indeed, Dolores on her own merits was already considered dazzling in Hollywood when she arrived in 1925, why did she almost immediately undergo plastic surgery on her face? Obviously, there is no mention of such surgery in the press or in documents, but a careful (or even not-so-careful) study of her portraits over time makes clear that she underwent several operations. The first was probably in 1926. The stills from *What Price Glory?* show her nose as rather wide; when *Loves of Carmen* was filmed in 1927, it was notably narrower. It seems likely, as well, that by the time *Wonder Bar* was filmed in 1934, she had undergone yet another operation on her nose, this perhaps the last on that part of her face but by no means her last surgery, and stills taken at about this time are simply dazzling.

It is possible, of course, that these surgeries reflect a racialized or whitening change in her appearance. Yet del Río's Latinness was never denied in Hollywood, by herself or her publicists. Indeed, it was emphasized as an advantage. *Photoplay* commented after the release of *Loves of Carmen* that she was "the present leader of the Latin invasion. Her sudden success has been equaled only by the Scandinavian Greta Garbo and the American Clara Bow."[37] It seems reasonable to suggest that the ideals of beauty that were developing in Hollywood, or rather the exemplary figures of ideal beauty, were exotic foreigners with slender noses. Very quickly, Dolores was considered the very model of loveliness. Indeed, her friends' faces and

Dolores in about 1934, her dark skin emphasized by her white dress and her nose perceptibly narrowed from her early Hollywood publicity photographs. CEHM CARSO.

those of other aspiring actresses began to reflect her own, slightly altered, countenance. And this vision or perhaps model continued for at least three decades. Strikingly, the cover of a novel called *The Magic Scalpel*, published in 1960 by plastic surgeon Maxwell Maltz, shows a doctor unwrapping the bandages from a woman with a beautiful new face. The patient looks exactly like Dolores, arching eyebrows, high cheekbones, narrow nose and all. Although I do not know who selected the image, whether doctor or artist or editor, the likeness is obvious and indicates selection by someone seeking to illustrate the beautiful ideal.[38]

Although she was a passable and sometimes very fine actress and always enormously charming, it was principally her physical beauty and celebrity, and the power they gave her, that made it possible for her to achieve fame and celebrity, and finally a significant measure of control over her personal and professional lives. Questions arise throughout her career of who might be using whom. Early in her Hollywood years, caught in a conflict between her husband and her director/mentor, she suffered confusion and distress, sometimes even misery. Later, with more experience and maturity, her power and control increased. What might have made this power possible, particularly in comparison to other young women coming to Hollywood at about same time, and for many decades thereafter, who were quite clearly used and abused?

Certainly, the self-confidence that was derived from the approval her beauty and charm elicited in those around her must have helped, as did the devotion of her mother. She later told a niece that her extraordinary poise and self-assurance came directly from always knowing she was loved, and her mother was certainly the most important figure giving her consistent affection, approval, and support.[39] Early successes led to her being in high demand by producers, directors, and studios through the late 1920s. In the 1930s, her career waned as she aged, but a move back to Mexico in the early 1940s led to her becoming one of the great divas of Mexican film, and from the 1950s onward she was active in the theater and in television. She also seems to have been very good at managing her money; and whether or not she needed it when she got to Hollywood, she always seems to have had it thereafter and to have looked after it carefully. There is no question, looking through her papers, that she maintained a direct hand in supervising her own interests, delegating to others where possible but deciding major issues on her own. If indeed her image was whitened or racialized,

she herself was significant in establishing an image of beauty in which foreign and exotic were not only accepted but splendid.

Moreover, if she submitted to physical changes—cosmetics, changing hair styles, adornment, costuming, even plastic surgery—these seemed to be changes she not only acquiesced in but in some cases relished. The facial alterations moved her beyond youthful attractiveness to a classic aesthetic that made her even more powerful, as an image of beauty both on the screen and in her personal life. The appropriate question here, it seems to me, is for whom she made these changes and who benefited. Several other questions are explored in the following chapters. How did her beauty and Mexican nationality affect her career? How did these factors affect relationships with others in her personal, professional, and public lives? How did her life and career and image differ in Hollywood and in Mexico? Why was she able to continue her career almost until her death, when so many beautiful women saw their careers fade even as they moved into their thirties? What were her important professional contributions? How did her career fit into other trends in the artistic world, on both sides of the border, in films and in relation to literature and the other arts? What impact did her beauty have on the power to chart her own life course? And, finally, two larger questions: why and how was she able to shift the racial and ethnic ideas in the United States in regard to Mexicans, and why was she able to defy social attitudes toward the proper roles of upper-class Mexican women in that country, to become the iconic, respected, and idolized great lady of Mexican film and culture? In the next chapters, we investigate the interactions of celebrity and fame, expressed nationally and internationally, with issues of social change, evolving technologies of communication, and movement across borders, all expressed in the life of a beautiful and powerful but not invulnerable woman.