



Hollywood Beauty: Linda Darnell and the American Dream

Ronald L. Davis

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At fifteen, Linda Darnell left her Texas home and normal adolescence to live the Hollywood dream promoted by fan magazine and studio publicity offices. She appeared in dozens of films and won international acclaim for *Blood and Sand* (playing opposite Tyrone Power), *Forever Amber*, *A Letter to Three Wives*, and the original version of *Unfaithfully Yours*.

Driven by a stage mother to become rich and Famous, but unable to cope with the career she had longed for as a child, Darnell soon was caught in a downward spiral of drinking, failed marriages, and exploitive relationships. By her early twenties she was an alcoholic, hardened by a life in which beautiful women were chattel, and by the time of her death at age forty- one, she was struggling for recognition in the industry that once had called her its "glory girl."

Hollywood Beauty begins in the Southwest during the Depression, when Pearl Darnell became obsessed by the glitter of the movie world that would dominate her children's lives. We follow Linda's path from her Texas childhood and first public success—during the state centennial, in 1936—through her contract work with Twentieth Century-Fox in the heyday of the big-studio system. Film historian Ronald L. Davis documents Darnell's discovery and marriages, the adoption of her daughter, the marking of many well-known films, and her emotional difficulties, leading up to her tragic death by fire.

This is the story of a native teenager from a dysfunctional middle-class family thrust into the golden age of Hollywood. *Hollywood Beauty* examines America's public worship of movie stars and superficial success—its motives and consequences—and the addiction to escapism that this worship represents.

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