Garbo, Greta (1905 – 1990)

Definition: Garbo, Greta from Philip's Encyclopedia

Swedish film actress. Garbo's aura of mystery and enigmatic beauty made her an adored screen idol. Her first lead role was in Torrent (1926). Her first 'talkie' was Anna Christie (1930). She played the leads in the classics Anna Karenina (1935) and Camille (1937), and the comedy Ninotchka (1939). She retired in 1941.

Summary Article: Garbo, Greta from Chambers Biographical Dictionary

professional name of

Greta Lovisa Gustafsson

1905-90

Swedish-born US film actress, a glamorous star of 1930s films

Born in Stockholm, she became a shop assistant and model, and won a bathing beauty competition at 16, then won a scholarship to the Royal Theatre Dramatic School in her home city. She was given a starring role in Gösta Berling's Saga (1924) by the Swedish director Mauritz Stiller; he also gave his star the name Garbo (chosen before he met her), trained her in acting technique, and insisted that she be given a contract at MGM in Hollywood when he moved there in 1925. He co-directed her in The Temptress (1926).

She was an actress of remarkable talent and legendary beauty, as her appearances in Flesh and the Devil (1927), Love (1927) and A Woman of Affairs (1928) showed. Her first talking role was in Anna Christie (1930), and this was followed by her greatest successes, Queen Christina (1933), Anna Karenina (1935), Camille (1936), Conquest (1937), in which she played Napoleon I's mistress, and Ninotchka (1939), a romantic comedy in which she caricatured her own aloof image and famously laughed. She retired from films in 1941, distressed by the scathing reviews of Two-Faced Woman.

She became a US citizen in 1951 but lived in New York as a total recluse for the rest of her life. In 1955 she was awarded an Academy Honorary Award for her "unforgettable screen performances"; the award was accepted for her by Nancy Kelly. Later attempts to persuade her to return to the screen were all unsuccessful.

"I want to be alone." The media have frequently attributed these words to Garbo, although she always denied she said them. In the film Grand Hotel (1932) Grusinskaya (played by Garbo) says "I want to be left alone."

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