



*spirit  
of garbo  
moon  
laramie*



modern esoterica

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**martin firrell company**  
MODERN ESOTERICA

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Text is set in Baskerville, 12pt on 17pt.

Baskerville is a serif typeface designed in 1754 by John Baskerville (1706–1775) in Birmingham, England. Compared to earlier typeface designs, Baskerville increased the contrast between thick and thin strokes. Serifs were made sharper and more tapered, and the axis of rounded letters was placed in a more vertical position. The curved strokes were made more circular in shape, and the characters became more regular.

Baskerville is categorized as a transitional typeface between classical typefaces and high contrast modern faces. Of his own typeface, John Baskerville wrote, 'Having been an early admirer of the beauty of letters, I became insensibly desirous of contributing to the perfection of them. I formed to myself ideas of greater accuracy than had yet appeared, and had endeavoured to produce a set of types according to what I conceived to be their true proportion.'

*Not to  
think,  
only to  
live, only  
to feel.*

GARBO IN ANNA KARENINA  
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER 1935

*Self-actualised people are able to live fully in the present moment.*

In *Romance*, Rita Cavallini (Garbo), tells her lover, Tom Armstrong (Gavin Gordon), that the future and the past are just clouds and shadows. The only thing of any substance is the little minute that we call 'today'. Garbo was careful not to lose sight of today in anticipation of tomorrow. Living in the vibrancy of the moment was what it meant to be fully alive. The playwright Kenneth Jupp first met Garbo in 1961 at a house party in the Manhattan home of actor Zachary Scott. Jupp was struck by her ability to focus completely on the present to the exclusion of all else. This quality had been noted before by the actor Judith Malina when she spied Garbo in a small confectioner's in Madison Avenue. Malina described Garbo's attention focused just as intensely on the person behind the counter as it would have been on any of her leading men. Garbo's reverence for the vitality of the moment was one reason she didn't rehearse her scenes before a take. She learned her lines at home, came into the studio and delivered them as the camera rolled.

The South American heartthrob Ramon Novarro starred opposite Garbo as her romantic interest, Lieutenant Alexis Rosanoff, in *Mata Hari*. Novarro was unnerved by her reluctance to rehearse until he saw the value in the immediacy of her approach. He observed Garbo's whole being change as the cameras turned over and the scene began. It was as if she took hold of the unfolding moment, generating an intensity that energised the actor playing opposite her. Her presence in linear time powered her presence on screen. Ramon Novarro tells Garbo's Mata

Hari that he expects the war to be over by the end of next year. ‘I never look ahead,’ she replies. In *Ninotchka*, she observes that nothing is permanent, all civilisations crumble. She says that we should take our time and have ‘our moment’.

Garbo was walking on the beach in Santa Monica with Mercedes de Acosta when she recognised the beach house belonging to the director Ernst Lubitsch. She grabbed Mercedes’ hand, marched up to the house and banged on the window. Lubitsch yelped, ‘My God, Greta!’ He took her in his arms and kissed her impetuously. Holding her hand, he told Garbo how much he had always wanted to direct her. She asked him to speak to the executives at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Soon afterwards, he was announced as the director of Garbo’s twenty-fifth Hollywood picture, *Ninotchka*. Released in 1939, it would become one of her most successful films.

Garbo was equally impetuous when she wanted advice about her growing art collection. Although she had never met him, she knew the actor Edward G. Robinson was a knowledgeable collector. With a painting under her arm, she went to his home and rang the door bell. When the door opened, she simply said, ‘Is Mr. Robinson in? My name is Garbo.’ Surprised to find the ‘Great Garbo’ on his doorstep, Robinson invited her in. The painting under her arm was a landscape by an unknown artist. Robinson advised her to hang the picture in her house so she could see it in different light at different times of day. When she told him the artist

was down on his luck and needed the money, Robinson encouraged her to buy the picture regardless. She did. Garbo enjoyed a sensuous relationship with the world. When she first visited Berlin she immediately liked the city because of the way it smelled. This was how she entered into the richness of life - through its physical wonders. The taste of Coney Island hotdogs, the feel of torrential rain drumming on her skin, the popping of soap bubbles on water, all held Garbo captivated in the present moment. According to her friend Jane Perry Gunther, Garbo had held onto the ability to take a child-like delight in all things.

Garbo signed her first contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer at the studio's Broadway office in 1926. Publicist Howard Dietz thought her rather eccentric as she drifted around smelling the walls and caressing the curtains. In response to Dietz's quizzical stare, she told him she was gaining a sense of the character of the room. This moment is famously re-imagined in *Queen Christina*. Stopping for the night at an inn, she glides around her bedroom stroking wall hangings, sideboards, candlesticks and jewellery boxes. In the same film, she tells the Lord Chancellor how much she loves snow. She describes it as being like the wild sea, something to lose oneself in. In *Camille*, she bends down to smell the earth during a walk in the countryside. She tells her lover, Armand, that it has a beautiful aroma like perfume. In *Two-Faced Woman*, she suggests that rolling about in the snow can be a purifying experience and in *Mata Hari*, she remarks on the beauty of Paris in the springtime

with all its chestnut trees in blossom. The Cloisters Museum in New York has a permanent exhibition of the *Unicorn Tapestries*. The collection dates from the beginning of the 16th century and was purportedly commissioned for the marriage of the French king, Louis XII. It depicts a group of noblemen engaged in a hunt for a unicorn. Garbo visited the exhibition with Cecil Beaton in the spring of 1946. Beaton described her growing euphoria as she took in every detail of the seven tapestries on show. She whistled and sighed as she regarded the finely crafted butterflies and wildflowers woven into the delicate wall hangings. She told Beaton how incredible human beings were that they could create something of such beauty. Garbo was able to respond energetically to the stimuli she encountered. She was able to find enjoyment in revisiting a work of art again and again. She visited the Durlacher Brothers Gallery in Manhattan repeatedly to look at the symbol-rich paintings of the Russian artist Pavel Tchelitchev. By the 1940s, she had become an avid art collector. This prompted her friend, the composer David Diamond, to nickname her Midtown apartment 'Le Petit Musée'. Howard Dietz also collected art. He acknowledged Garbo as someone who could study a piece of art in great detail. He felt she contemplated artworks 'patiently'.

As Yvonne Valbret in *Inspiration*, she apologises to her ex-lover André that she has not wrapped his love letters neatly, ready for him to collect. Instead, she has been reading them over and over again, struck by how beautiful they are.

She puts a record on the gramophone and tells him she has played it again and again because it reminds her of the night he came back to her. Following the death of Mauritz Stiller, Garbo asked to see his possessions. She spent time touching items of particular significance: a rug she had seen him buy in Turkey, a suitcase he had bought in America. She lost herself in the memories evoked by these physical traces of their shared experiences. In later life, Garbo haunted the antique shops of Third Avenue. She would sit for hours in the workroom of one store in particular where craftsmen restored furniture. Without saying a word, she simply watched them work.

Garbo survived her years in Hollywood by taking long drives out to Lake Arrowhead. Surrounded by the wild beauty of lake and pine forest, she would sit quietly and read a book. In 1932, she planned six weeks of glorious isolation at Silver Lake in the Eastern Sierra. By the second day, she was so intoxicated with the intensity of the moment that she asked her chauffeur, James, to drive her back across the Mojave Desert to fetch Mercedes de Acosta. She wanted Mercedes to feel what she felt. There was always the risk that the break in her time at Silver Lake might rob her feeling of its initial intensity. But on her return with Mercedes, she re-experienced the landscape in all its glory as if seeing it for the first time. Mercedes likened Garbo to a nature spirit, formed out of rocks, storms, trees and water, jumping from rock to rock in her bare feet. For Christmas, Garbo bought Mercedes a raincoat, wellingtons and a sou'wester hat.

Whenever the weather turned stormy, she and Garbo would rush out to watch the lightning illuminate the sky and listen to the thunder crashing in the distance. Garbo was always exhilarated by the power of an electrical storm to inundate the senses. In *The Single Standard*, Garbo's character, Arden Stuart, tells her lover Packy Cannon (Nils Asther) how much she adores the pouring rain. In *Ninotchka*, Count Léon (Melvyn Douglas) asks Garbo's Ninotchka, 'Do Russians ever think about life, about the moment in which we are living? The only moment we ever really have.'

*about the author*

*Moon Laramie is an esoteric author and a Theosophist. He is interested in exploring the power of thought forms, the relationship between the physical and astral worlds, reincarnation and karmic law.*

*Moon Laramie is the author of *The Zombie Inside, A Practical Guide to the Law of Attraction.**

*He has written for a number of publications including *Kindred Spirit* and *The Best You*, and is a regular contributor to *The Magic Happens* magazine.*

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# *spirit of garbo*

*Greta Garbo has often been depicted as a lonely recluse. The truth is very different.*

*Once described as 'rather a crazy mystic Swede', Garbo was an independent spiritual explorer whose sense of connection to the natural world was profound. She can be regarded as a 'kosmocentric' thinker drawn to occult ideas.*

*Moon Laramie maps the essential aspects of self-actualisation, as defined by psychologist Abraham Maslow, onto Garbo's spiritual journey.*

*These include a profound sense of self; recognition of her own essential unity with nature and all life; living fully in the moment; being unrestricted by national or cultural boundaries in the way she viewed the world.*

*Laramie argues that it was Garbo's spiritual sense that enabled her to triumph over Hollywood, defying the patriarchal pressures of both the studio system and wider society.*

*'All true artists, like all true mystics, have illumination in a lesser or a greater degree.'* MERCEDES DE ACOSTA ON GARBO



**martin firrell company**