



*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.'

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MERCEDES DE ACOSTA ON GARBO

Self-actualised people see their own interconnectedness with the rest of the cosmos.

‘What do you believe about god?’ was a question Garbo often asked people she met. A devout Christian or a committed atheist might ask, ‘Do you believe in God?’ But Garbo was not looking for a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. She phrased her inquiry as an open question because she was open to a multiplicity of answers and possibilities. Cecil Beaton called her an enigma brimming with spiritual thoughts. Leif Erickson, her co-star in *Marie Walewska*, described her as the hippie of the world, surveying the scene but not partaking in it. She was in the world but not of the world. Mercedes de Acosta described her as a kind of wild mystic. Mercedes saw in Garbo a profound soul quality that seemed to lift her beyond the material world. Like Garbo, Mercedes was curious about the possibilities of spiritual development. She was a devotee of the Indian sages Ramana Maharshi and Sri Meher Baba. She practised yoga, dabbled in astrology and was a friend of the poet Kahlil Gibran who introduced her to the Hindu texts *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Mahabharata* and *The Upanishads*. Mercedes had extrasensory abilities that had begun to develop when she was very young. She sensed there were powerful psychic forces at work in her relationship with Garbo; the deep affection the two women shared had opened a metaphysical channel between them.

Mercedes believed Garbo so captivated the public because her performances radiated a celestial quality. According to Mercedes, someone watching Garbo on screen came into contact with mystic forces that were incomprehensible. Mauritz Stiller pictured the ideal woman

as super sensual, spiritual and mystic. These were the qualities he was looking for in a protégé and Garbo was all these things. Her other-worldliness is depicted in her films over and over again. Her Javanese temple dance bewitches the opening frames of *Mata Hari*. In *Camille*, she tells Armand's father of her premonition of death. In *Anna Christie*, she intimates knowledge of after-death states and reincarnation. She describes being lost in a fog for what seems like forever, ultimately emerging with no memory of what happened before. Perhaps this was what Mercedes first saw when she described Garbo's eyes as having a look of eternity.

For Garbo, belief in a superlunary consciousness provided an anchor in an uncertain world. With unshakeable faith came surety, protection and a sense of belonging. Yet her spiritual inclination did not take her in the direction of organised religion. She believed there was great wisdom in the Bible but found the Church's literal interpretation asinine. Her friendship with Mercedes brought her into contact with a hidden world of occult beliefs and hermetic theology. She came to realise there was an esoteric meaning to the Bible that guided the reader away from crude ideas of hellfire and damnation. This arcane exegesis revealed a path of goodness, which Garbo described as the greatest force in the world. Christianity, like all world religions, formed an integral part of a much greater whole, but it did not provide the complete picture. There was a hidden truth known to students of ancient mystery traditions which

revealed the secrets of the cosmos. One night, on a mountain peak in California's Casa del Mare, Mercedes initiated Garbo into the ideas of the esoteric movement called Theosophy. In 1875, the Russian occultist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, her companion Henry Steele Olcott and the esotericist William Quan Judge founded the Theosophical Society. Many of its doctrines were inspired by Blavatsky's travels in India and Tibet. The term 'Theosophy' means literally 'divine wisdom'. The Theosophical Society aimed to form a nucleus of universal brotherhood amongst all people regardless of the differences between them. It promoted the comparative study of religion, philosophy and science. It advocated the investigation of unexplained natural laws and the latent powers hidden within humanity. On that mountaintop in Casa del Mare, Garbo and Mercedes spent the entire night talking about occult cosmology or sitting in silent contemplation. Mercedes later likened Garbo to the physical embodiment of an elemental goddess, an idea redolent of the Theosophical doctrine that humankind is descended from the divine.

Years after the two women's mountaintop vigil, Garbo met Leopold Stokowski for the first time at a party given by the novelist, Anita Loos. A committed occultist, Stokowski told Garbo they shared a destiny that had been written in the stars by the gods themselves. Stokowski shared with her esoteric knowledge he had gained during his travels in India. He fascinated Garbo with his description of a whole day

spent on a mountaintop discussing destiny and the soul with an Indian sage. It was only after he and the sage had parted that Stokowski realised they had understood each other perfectly - even though he spoke no Hindi and the sage spoke no English. Stokowski's story inevitably reminded Garbo of her earlier mountaintop vigil with Mercedes de Acosta. In that incarnation of the story, the place of the sage had been taken by Mercedes and Stokowski's role as initiate had been played by Garbo.

With Sam Green, Garbo would often discuss spiritual questions ranging from metempsychosis to mediumship and communication with spirits. In *The Painted Veil*, Garbo's character, Katrin, declares her love for China. Soon after arriving in that country, she describes it as so full of spells, they seem to be the reason for everything. She attends a Chinese sun and moon festival. Performers in ornate costumes act out a legend in which the sun god slays a dragon to save his lover so they can roam the skies for all eternity. She has her fortune told in a Buddhist temple, heady with burning incense and said to be inhabited by mighty gods. Garbo portrays Katrin as an earnest spiritual seeker with a yearning to experience the ancient spirituality of China, a desire Garbo shared.

In a letter to Garbo, dated 3 November 1957, Cecil Beaton told her he had noticed her spiritual thoughts turning towards the Orient. Garbo's fascination with eastern philosophies and mystical traditions was strongly influenced by her relationship with Mercedes. In many ways Mercedes

was her spiritual mentor. In 1933, Mercedes suffered serious injuries in a traffic accident. She was taking an afternoon drive in the San Fernando Valley when she was involved in a collision at a crossroads. She was thrown from her car and struck her head on the roadway. She was rushed to Santa Monica Hospital in a critical condition. Unconscious, between life and death, she had the impression that her spirit had travelled great distances from her body. Later she was told she had been unconscious barely a few moments. Following her convalescence, Mercedes suffered periods of depression and even contemplated suicide. Help came in the form of Sri Meher Baba. He told her that suicide would simply result in another incarnation involving the same problems. The only answer was to develop God Realisation, to see the divine in everything. If Mercedes did this, he advised, everything would become easier.

Mercedes met the author Paul Brunton at the home of Garbo's costume designer, Adrian. In Brunton's book, *A Search in Secret India*, Mercedes learned about Ramana Maharshi. Maharshi believed that silence and self-enquiry were the surest routes to self-realisation. He saw the Self as a non-personal, all inclusive awareness from which everything manifested. In the autumn of 1936, Sri Meher Baba invited her to visit him in Cannes on the French Riviera. She travelled to France and spent a short time as his pupil. Garbo was the only person who knew where she had gone. Before Mercedes left him, Baba told her she must always keep moving. That was the point of life, never to

become static. Two years later, in October 1938, Mercedes began her six month odyssey in India. She visited Jaipur and the Taj Mahal and saw Sri Meher Baba once more. She was also granted an audience with Ramana Maharshi, a mystic she had previously only read about. He told her that she was to become an adept. He told her she must seek the Self within the Spiritual Heart. Shortly afterwards she sailed back to America via Colombo and Bombay. Her experiences in India had had a profound effect on her. She became so immersed in the eastern tradition that she planned one day to write a thesis on Indian philosophy. Sadly, she died before she could complete the task.

Garbo had rejected the organised religion of the Christian church for more heterodox spiritual beliefs. She regarded many devout Christians as hypocritical. The dress designer Valentina Schlee had once been a close friend. When Valentina's husband George began spending more time with Garbo, Valentina was consumed with resentment and hatred. When Schlee died, Valentina barred Garbo from attending his funeral. She arranged for a priest to exorcise every room in their home that might bear traces of her. Garbo, who had done nothing wrong, was stung by Valentina's actions. It was incredible to her that a former friend and committed Christian could behave with such heartless malice towards another human being. In Christianity's place, Garbo found Theosophy, an altogether more inclusive spiritual tradition. Its occult aspects captured her imagination. She was drawn to the concepts of astral

travel, humanity's divine origins, reincarnation and the rejection of materialism, all ideas to be found in the writings of Helena Blavatsky. Garbo's nonconformist tendencies led her to the unorthodox figure of Blavatsky for inspiration. James Pope-Hennessy, the travel writer and friend of Cecil Beaton, was quick to notice Garbo's predilection for this eastward-looking spiritual movement. In a letter, he described Garbo as 'interested in Theosophy, dieting, and all other cranky subjects.'

spirit of garbo

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



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