

# BOOK OF A LIFETIME

## THE MARRIAGE OF CADMUS AND HARMONY

BY ROBERTO CALASSO

1 I pick up books with scepticism. It's as if I were eager to discover they were of no interest to me so that I could safely put them down again. And when *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* was thrust into my hands at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1990, I was doubly sceptical. Because at the time its title was *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia* and an American lady wanted me to translate it. "It's a wonderful book about the Greek gods," she enthused, "by the Italian scholar and publisher, Roberto Calasso."

2 So it was easy to say no. The book was 400-plus pages. I was already thinking I must stop translating to have more time for my own work. I was not interested in the Greek gods, and certainly not in an Italian academic's verbose and dusty take on them.

3 "Please, Tim," the lady insisted, "just give it ten pages." That plea rang a bell. It was what I used to ask when I sent in an unsolicited manuscript. It was one of the most important decisions of my career, my life in a way. Back home in Verona, I opened the first page and read, in Italian, an epigraph from Sallust: "These things never happened, but are always." Is it possible, I wondered, to write such a tense sequence in English? And then the opening paragraph, which two years later, after interminable

revisions, would be thus: "On a beach in Sidon a bull was aping a lover's coo. It was Zeus. He shuddered, the way he did when a gadfly got him. But this time it was a sweet shuddering. Eros was lifting a girl onto its back: Europa."

4 It was an entirely new reading experience. After 20 pages, I had phoned New York and told them I would do it. Calasso has a remarkable capacity to dart in and out of stories, telling them in different ways with different details; there is no tedious explanation, no questioning of validity. Dazzling, even bewildering at first, a vast body of bizarre material slowly declares itself in vibrant patterns. It is as if a gallery of ruined paintings had been restored to animate life, each calling to the others, complementing and contradicting, or keeping secrets, telling lies. The rooms of the gallery are a maze and some demented attendant must be shifting the noisy canvases about so that they laugh and quarrel together in new ways. Eventually, surprise subsides into recognition: these are Europe's ancestors; with a shiver you are bound to admit that their way of seeing the world was at least as sophisticated as yours. I learned a thousand stylistic devices translating this book, and stole as many as I could for my own writing. But most of all it inspired an orgy of reading in any number of directions. Quite suddenly life and, yes, even love was different and new.

Tim Parks

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## Tekst 4 Book of a lifetime

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- 2p 5 Geef van elk van de volgende beweringen aan of deze wel of niet overeenkomt met wat Tim Parks schrijft in de alinea's 1 en 2.
- 1 With every new book he hopes to find confirmation for its lack of appeal.
  - 2 Experience has taught him to distrust books that other people try to force on him.
  - 3 His own misgivings against the book by Calasso made him unwilling to get involved in it.
  - 4 He assumed that the wordiness and length of the book by Calasso would prove to be an obstacle for him.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".

- 1p 6 In welk tekstgedeelte, bestaande uit 2 zinnen, gebruikt Tim Parks beeldspraak om het beeld te beschrijven dat het lezen van Calasso's boek bij hem oproept? Citeer de eerste twee én de laatste twee woorden van dit tekstgedeelte.

- 1p 7 What did Tim Parks acknowledge after he had finished translating Calasso's book?
- A Modern man still has a lot to learn from the ancient Greeks.
  - B Storytelling has kept its fascinating character throughout the ages.
  - C The ancient Greeks' view of the world was just as subtle as man's world today.
  - D There has been little progress in civilisation since the days of ancient Greece.

Aan het slot van zijn artikel beschrijft Tim Parks twee effecten die het lezen en vertalen van Calasso's boek op hem hebben gehad.

- 2p 8 Welke twee?

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### Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.