

LÁSKO, A NOVEL

[Lásko](#) is a novel by Canadian author [Catherine Cooper](#), which was published in 2023 by Freehand Books. Set in Prague, Czech Republic, it is described by author Johanna Skibsrud as, “at once an intimate tale of personal awakening, a love story, and a provocative parable about the lures and dangers of influence.”

While *Lásko* is a work of fiction, the book’s protagonist, Mája, meets several real-world characters over the course of the story, including Takiwasi’s Jacques Mabit and Rosa Giove Nakazawa.

Author Catherine Cooper writes,

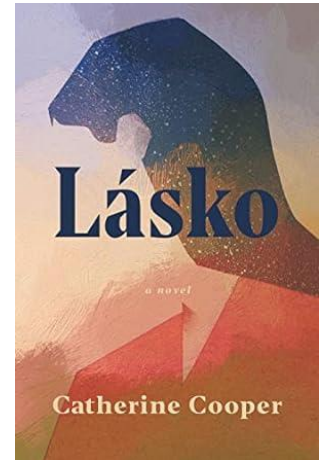
“In 2013, I watched a Youtube video where Jacques spoke about the myths that predominate in different epochs in human history. As I was watching it, I somehow knew that I would meet Jacques and write about his work in some way. A few weeks later, my husband asked me if I would like to go to a conference in Prague where a French doctor who lives in Peru would be talking about ayahuasca. That was such a coincidence, so we went, and after the conference Jacques and Rosa generously agreed to speak with me about their lives and work. That conversation—and my later visit to Takiwasi—became an important source of inspiration for *Lásko*.”

The following is compiled from interviews Cooper conducted with Mabit and Giove in Prague in 2013 and in Tarapoto, Peru, in 2014.

Jacques Mabit was born in New Caledonia, grew up in the tropics, and moved to France when he was a teenager. When he was twenty-five, he came to Peru with Médecins Sans Frontières. His objective was to establish a new health centre, but with little access to medicine and instruments, there was often nothing he could do to help the few patients who did come to see him.

Next door to the health centre was a midwife who occasionally sent him pregnant patients. “She told me beforehand what was happening with them,” he says. “And what she told me was correct, so I asked her, How do you know all of this?” She said she was taking care of animals in the mountains when she was struck by lightning during a thunderstorm, and ever since, she has known how to heal.

“It was incomprehensible,” he says. “How can a meteorological accident teach her that?” He continued to meet local healers, and he was amazed by how well their methods worked. “There were things I knew with western medicine it was impossible to heal,” he says. “Or it would take a very long time, but people were healing these things with very simple methods and with techniques using plants and rituals, and it works, strongly. So how does it work? Is it because of something cultural that I don’t have access to? Is it something universal being explained culturally? Can I learn? Can I know it?”



After he left Peru, Jacques travelled to India, where he visited Mother Teresa's hospice for the dying. When he arrived, he introduced himself and said that he was a physician. A nun asked him to sit with a dying man who lay unconscious in a bed. He says there was nothing he could do for the man but hold his hand and inwardly offer his availability. Soon afterward, the man died.

Later, back at his hotel, Jacques was feeling overwhelmingly depressed when he spontaneously entered a trance-like state. "I was taken to death," he says. "To the place where I could see life. And I entered into a process as if I was dying myself, not physically, but psychically, and from within that darkness I felt the presence of an inner light. I was asking myself how I could reach it. Religion was too distant, politics no, science neither, and then I remembered the healers I had met, who knew things that I didn't know. And I thought maybe they could teach me."

He returned to Peru and began to train with Amazonian curanderos, specialists in traditional medicine. "They told me do that, do that, do that, and I did it, even if I didn't understand," he says. "Because if I started to analyse it rationally, I wouldn't have done it. When I asked how the plants work, they responded with very poor sentences from a western rationalist perspective. I would say, How do the plants teach? And they would say, They teach by teaching. I would say, Why do they heal? And they would say, Because they have healing properties. And each time I accepted that it's not through words, but through experience with the plants. The plant could speak to you. And how could she speak to you? You have to take it. You will be afraid, but through dreams and visions and intuitions, little by little . . ."

The first time Jacques drank ayahuasca, nothing happened. "I was very scared, very on the defensive, and I blocked everything," he says. The second time, he was immediately projected into visions. "It was a terrible experience," he says. He found himself being dragged into an abyss by a boa constrictor. "Externally I stayed very calm," he says. "I realised afterward that everything happened inside, in my depths. I resisted death, I gathered all my resources, but the snake was stronger than me. There was nothing I could do, and I was angry with myself. I was thinking, why did I take this drug? This is something for Indigenous people, not for whites, and now I'm dying."

He thought about his parents. "I was thinking how they will say our son was a doctor, he went to Amazonia, and he took a drug, and he died."

"I saw myself dead in a coffin, everything that could happen as a consequence, and bit by bit, acceptance. Because there was nothing I could do. There was no other solution. I couldn't call the healer or cry. I was totally trapped." He accepted that his life had been what it had been, and in the morning the world would carry on without him.

"I realised I wasn't important," he says. "And at that moment, a sentence came to me, but it was like it came from outside, and it was Jacques is not important. Jacques is not important. Jacques is not important. Three times. And the third time, when I accepted that I had no importance, the snake disappeared, and there I was in this abyss, but at that moment, I let go."

In his eighth ayahuasca session, Jacques was confronted by a panel of people who asked him why he was there. He said that he wanted to learn to work with the medicine, and they told him that he had permission to enter the territory, but his path would be to treat people

with addictions. He had no interest or experience in that area, so he dismissed the message and continued his training with traditional healers.

When he first visited the city of Tarapoto in northern Peru, Jacques says he knew it would be the place where he would settle. "I knew immediately, as the plane was coming down, and I was thinking, In all the world why this little town? But it was confirmed very quickly, and everything that was done after that was always with these indications from intuition or in dreams or later, when I took plants, around the taking of the plant."

In Tarapoto, Jacques met Rosa, a doctor from Lima. Like Jacques, Rosa initially found herself in conflict with patients who preferred traditional healers, but she began to study Amazonian medicine herself after witnessing its benefits, and later she founded a clinic in Tarapoto that integrates allopathic and traditional approaches.

"I didn't like [Tarapoto] at first," Rosa says. "I was in a war, and I was trying to compare and understand why do people prefer this other medicine and not mine?"

In many cases, she says, people left the hospital when treatment didn't work, and when she saw them later they were healthy. She asked what had happened, and they told her they had gone to traditional healers. She says she also began to notice that the overall population had less resistant bacteria than she was used to seeing.

"When I was in Lima, I worked in a hospital, and there were a lot of cases of patients that were very complicated because they don't respond to antibiotics, because there is a lot of resistance," she says. This doesn't mean that antibiotics don't have a place, she says, only that the use of traditional remedies limits the need for them.

Having never taken any form of intoxicant stronger than coffee or chocolate, she arrived at her first ayahuasca session with a stethoscope and blood pressure monitor. "Second by second I was checking my pulse, my blood pressure, my heart rate," she says. She also had a torch and notebook so that she could write down what happened, but after several hours of nothing, she fell asleep and had a dream, which she later realized was a vision.

In the dream, she was at the ayahuasca session with her estranged husband, and the curandero was scolding her, asking her why she was getting divorced. "When he called me to do a healing, instead of healing me he was saying that my husband is a very good person and that a good woman wouldn't get a divorce. He also asked me why I was dressed the way I was, because in Lima we dressed in a kind of hippie style, and it wasn't traditional. I got more and more angry, and I decided that I didn't want to know anything more about ayahuasca, but later I realized that the dream was about my relationship with my mother."

Reflecting on it later, Rosa understood that she couldn't connect with the plant because she was too focused on monitoring herself, so she decided to go a second time on the condition that the curandero wouldn't talk to her or try to give her any individual healing. During that session, she also fell asleep, and this time she had a vision of herself as a small child standing before a great mountain of ice, and on the top of the mountain was her mother. For her, this represented the coldness of her maternal relationship, and after that session, she noticed that some of her long-held fears had disappeared.

Rosa knew that Jacques had received the message that he should work in addiction treatment, but at first she didn't take it seriously. "I thought it was an idea that would pass," she says. Then Jacques had an ayahuasca session where a woman asked him if he was sincere

about wanting to work with plants. He confirmed that he was, and she said he should remember his assignment. He agreed. The next morning, a psychiatrist from Lima called Jacques and Rosa and asked if they could accept a patient with a substance use disorder. "That was a coincidence of life," Rosa says. They accepted the referral, and that was the beginning of Takiwasi, the non-profit rehabilitation centre and therapeutic community that they founded in Tarapoto in 1992.

In Jacques' view—which is inspired by the work of Carl Jung, mythologist and philosopher Jean-Charles Pichon and physician and psychoanalyst Bernard Herzog—humanity evolves through cycles in which each concurrent epoch is governed by a unique foundational myth. "That is myth in the positive sense of the word," he says. "As the most elevated spiritual and cultural horizon of a society."

The way he sees it, tribal societies are governed by the myth of justice, and westernised societies are governed by the myth of love. In the tribal context, he says, the centre of identification is the group, and group members seek an equilibrium of reciprocity with the external world, other tribes, the divine, spirits, plants, and animals. The westernised worldview, on the other hand, centres the individual, and the focus is turned inward, "So the question becomes, How do I solve myself?"

While each myth springs from an ideal, in practice, he says, they reveal their shadows—the myth of love the exploitative, desacralising force of individualism, which destroys nature and the human soul, and the myth of justice the exclusionary force of the collective, which can block individual liberties, incite intergroup conflict, and give rise to magic, sorcery, and other harmful traditional practices.

Jacques says that myths arise and decline in stages, but at the end of each stage, one myth degenerates as another emerges. Now we are experiencing both the waning of the myth of love and the infancy of the myth of freedom, and at this threshold, there is a great deal of confusion and contradiction. He says this is what you see with the New Age mentality, which he calls an imitation of the myth of freedom situated in the myth of love, where we accept everyone without seeing differences. "But that's not tolerance," he says. "Tolerance is accepting others despite differences. So this is the big danger of New Age. It's pretending to return again into undifferentiated forms, but that's contrary to essential differences, and that causes terrible confusion."

Jacques says that the myth of freedom will open the way for an integration of the highest horizons of the myths of justice and love—interdependence and individuation—but at this stage, true freedom is not well-understood. "True freedom is a paradox," he says. "Because it's about surrender. What are your resources? Your qualities? Your inheritances? Your gifts? What are the things that only you can use to say thank you to life? That's vocation. When you find that, you are obliged to forgo all the rest. So you are imprisoned by your calling, but in it you find freedom."

He says that freedom is associated with the element of air, so it is a spiritual myth and will manifest spiritually, but not in a grandiose or universal way. "I have the impression that it will come about by people liberating themselves, each following his own path," he says. "If there's a critical mass, a small number will suffice. Even one person can occasion a considerable

change, because they can go straight to the goal, and that can enter deeply into the spirit of the world.”