

Cast Not The Day: A Translation

BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University

**Ida Boogaard
3610683**

**Coordinator:
Onno Kusters**

**Second reader:
Rosalinde Supheert**

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Contents:

Introduction.....p. 3

Background.....p. 4

Analysis.....p. 6

Annotated translation.....p. 10

Bibliography.....p. 21

Appendix : Source text.....p. 22

Introduction

In a dusty corner in a small bookshop lay a book with a sand-coloured cover, begging to be picked up and read. And it was picked up, paid for, and read: *Cast Not the Day* by Paul Waters. The title has a taunting ring to it, and turns out to be a line from a poem by Algernon Charles Swinburne, an excerpt of which is printed on one of the first pages:

For thy kingdom is past not away,
Nor thy power from the place thereof hurled;
Out of heaven they shall cast not the day,
They shall cast not out song from the world. (Swinburne)

The choice of translating *Cast Not the Day* was perhaps an odd one, but rests on the fact that while the content is fascinating, especially to anyone who is interested in fourth-century England and the fall of the Roman Empire, the narrative is lacking and the style is repetitive and simple. This proved to be an interesting challenge in terms of translation, and it led to the following question; what can a translation contribute to the story? In this paper an in-depth analysis will examine the problems and peculiarities of the text and its translation, and the style and format of the source text will be looked at and adapted in the translation where necessary. The translation of the first three thousand words of the book will follow and footnotes are added to the translation to address specific problems and solutions.

Background

The young adult novel *Cast Not the Day* was written by Paul Waters. Waters has written two other works in this genre, *Of Merchants and Heroes* and *The Philosopher Prince*, which is the sequel to *Cast Not the Day*. All are set in the time of the fall of the Roman Empire. According to his website *paul-waters.com*, Waters has studied Classics in London, which is clearly visible in his works; Waters has tried to give as accurate a representation as possible of the time Waters is trying to represent in his novels.

The novel starts with a first-person narrative that tells the reader about the protagonist's earliest memories. This part has been translated and will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis. When the protagonist, Drusus, moves to London to live with his uncle Balbus, the story truly starts; Drusus is confronted with the rise of the Christian religion that is trying to overthrow the old Roman gods, and is horribly treated by his aunt, the wife of Balbus. At first life in London is difficult for him, but when he finds a group of soldiers in a bathing house, he starts training with them for a while and later befriends them. He also gains a friend, the grandson of one of the more influential senators of London. The story then tells how his character is formed by the different influences of these men; Drusus joins the legion of London and becomes more and more detached from his aunt and uncle and, most importantly, his cousin Albinus. Albinus has joined the bishop's cause to spread the new religion, Christianity, through London and through all of Britain. Even though Drusus prefers to stay out of trouble and does not actually choose a side, he abhors the way the citizens destroy the shrines of the old Roman gods, and the way the power-hungry bishop manipulates the people and the senate to his own ends. A boy Drusus meets, Marcellus, is quite different from his friends amongst the soldiers and becomes his best friend. Towards the end of the book Drusus wrestles with his feelings for Marcellus, which have seemingly developed into

something beyond a platonic friendship. This story is set against the backdrop of disarray caused by the death of Constantine the Great.

In this translation the majority of Drusus' life will not be explained, since only the beginning has been translated. The political setting must be examined in more detail because it is relevant, even from the first few pages, since it affects the life of Drusus directly. Also the Roman deity worshipping in the fourth century will be looked into, as well as the rise of Christianity as religion and political power.

The political situation after the death of Constantine the Great in 337 A.D. was quite complicated. Constantine the Great had accepted Christianity in the empire, but died leaving everything to Constantine II, Constans and Constantius, although according to Christopher S. Mackay "The details are somewhat unclear, since the sources preserve pathetic official lies" (Mackay, 316). The succession worked just like the centuries before, in which other possible successors were assassinated so the emperors were sure of their title of Augustus. However, according to Christopher S. Mackay, a commander from Gaul named Magnentius killed Constans, who in that time was emperor of the western region of the empire. Magnentius proclaimed himself Augustus, but soon tried to negotiate with Constantius about a peaceful way out of the whole situation. Despite the negotiations, Magnentius was defeated by Constantius during a fight at Mursa. Later Magnentius committed suicide when he was defeated by Constantius, and Constantius assumed the throne in the western and eastern part (Mackay, 318).

The Roman religion was a polytheistic one in which the kings, and later emperors, were worshipped alongside the gods, as it happened in ancient Egypt. The Roman religion became very broad and had distinctive features in the different regions; every time a new region or tribe was conquered, the previous religion was incorporated in the Roman one. In the fourth century, the time in which Waters has placed his novel, Christianity was more and

more popular, and the emperor Constantine the Great and his successor, Constantius II, were baptised Christians themselves. Although the Christian emperors tried to understand the pagan beliefs of their predecessors, their attempts did not succeed: “Yet the willingness of Christian emperors to find common ground with the pagans did not survive the fourth century. [...] ; over the course of the fourth century, bishops and monks widened their definition of ‘pagan’ practices and attitudes and then preached against them as sinful or sacrilegious” (Rüpke, 110). This comes back in Waters’ book as well, as the bishop of London craves to destroy the pagan practices and turns the citizens against the shrines of the old gods, and anyone who dares visit them. However, it is apparent that Waters paints them in a slightly darker light, as his protagonist Drusus is still slightly faithful to the pagan gods, and it pains him to see the shrines destroyed.

Analysis

Cast Not The Day is historical fiction, and its target audience mostly young adults. Therefore it is of importance not to overstress the archaic style that is used in the book, except when translating direct quotations of characters like Drusus’ father. Overall, Paul Waters writes long sentences with many subclauses and tends to begin his sentences with the word *but* very often, though on itself the style is not too challenging. In her article “Tekstanalyse en de moeilijkheidsgraad van een vertaling”¹, Christiane Nord distinguishes four different categories of translation, which determine the difficulty of translating the source text: the pragmatic level, socio-cultural level, linguistic level and source specific level (Nord, 145).

When looking at the pragmatic level, which deals the problems due to the difference in communicate situations, the most important problem is that the book is set in late Roman

¹ “Text Analysis and Levels of Difficulty in Translation.”

times in London. This means that certain words, gestures or expressions might have lost or changed their definition to the modern, young readers. Therefore special care had to be taken when translating passages such as the following: “[...] I would hear his voice in the courtyard, asking the slaves where I had gone. Then with a sigh I would pull myself up, pad across the sun-warm tiles, dust my tunic [...]” (2) and “I asked Sericus who would protect us from the Saxons, with the army gone.[...] I frowned at this, and bent my head to my wax-board and my exercises”(3). These sentences are not very unusual to modern readers, but do have some specific words that relate to the time period; *slaves*, *tunic*, *Saxons* and *wax-board*. Slaves in that time were a common sight in households. A tunic is something that might still be worn today, but in the antiquity it was a specific long shirt that was generally worn by the people as a basic garment. The Saxons plundered the country in the fourth century, although only from the second half of the fifth century onwards did they come as hordes. Nonetheless, the Saxons in those times are the feared pirates, not unlike Vikings, who attack, plunder and retreat regularly. A wax-board is simply a piece of wood with soft wax on it, used for writing and usually meant for students. This was a common object during the antiquity and early middle ages. Slaves and Saxons are generally known and do not need an explanation. However, before choosing the translation of tunic as the Dutch *tuniek*, the option of *hemd* or *onderkleed* was given. However, *onderkleed* does not cover the meaning as it is an undergarment, and *hemd* was perhaps a reasonable translation, but sounds somewhat modern, whereas *tuniek* associates with the antiquity. *Wax-board* posed a problem, with translations as *wassenbord*, *schrijfplaat* and *wassen plaat*, the final translation being *wasbordje*. This choice is discussed in greater detail in the footnotes in the translation. Aside from these specific passages, no other pragmatic problems arise.

On a socio-cultural level it is important to consider that *Cast Not the Day* is a historical novel, and therefore refers to the legal system, religion and daily interaction that

was supposedly part of in fourth century London. Despite this, the book was written for young adults, which makes the difficulty on this level considerably lower; Waters keeps the story modern and many things are explained by the narrator, Drusus. An example of this are the names that were used for towns; Waters uses London instead of Londinium, which would be the Latin term for the city, and the modern term Autun instead of the Latin Augustodunum. Similarly, Waters seems to prefer the generally accepted terms for a region. Thus he mentions Spain, giving it the same name as it carries today, Gaul, a term that is still familiar to many, but he also mentions Pannonia, which is a province that no longer exists and many would not know of its location. Since this is a young adults novel, the easiest and most fitting solution was to follow Waters and translate the place names as the modern versions instead of the Latin terms. Likewise, the word *decuriones* has been translated as *bevelhebers*

Problems on the linguistic level: even though the language use in this book tends to slip to a simplistic style, Waters created long sentences with many subclauses and present participles or gerunds. In Dutch, long sentences like these often must be broken into two or more separate sentences, or else the narrative becomes chaotic. Subclauses interrupting the main clause make the sentence more complex in Dutch as well, and since this is a stylistic feature occurring frequently in the first few chapters – it becomes easier to read later on – this also needed a solution. For instance: “Sericus had known her longest of all, longer even than my father, and it was he who brought her back to life for me, telling me about her smile, and how she threw back her long dark hair when she laughed, and how she had loved me even when she was carrying me in her belly” (Waters, 2). This sentence consists of seven subclauses, divided by commas. The last part seems to be an enumeration, a listing of the things Sericus tells Drusus. Hence the ‘and’ following the comma. In translating, this specific sentence remained one sentence and was not split. The enumeration was kept as well, since

that particular format it read natural in Dutch, but most commas have been discarded or replaced.

Some source text specific problems have been discussed earlier, but one of the salient ones is the use of *but* at the start of a sentence. Even though it might be natural to do this in English, in Dutch it is highly unnatural and therefore could not be translated thus. This feature is so repetitive that the occurrence of it became frustrating and at some points the full stop has been replaced by a comma to avoid the problem: “I had wanted to dress in something fine, to show I was not just nobody. But my clothes-chest had not yet come” (Waters, 12) is translated as: “Ik had iets moois willen aantrekken om te laten zien dat ik niet zomaar iemand was, maar mijn kist met kleren was nog niet gebracht”. In general, the usage of *maar* in the translation has been avoided at the start of a sentence, and instead has been changed into *echter* and placed further in the sentence, or left out: : “But otherwise it might have been some old attic store” (Waters, 10) becomes: “Voor de rest had het een oude opslagruimte kunnen zijn”. In these sentences the syntactic strategy, changing the structure of a clause, as described by Andrew Chesterman in his article “Vertaalstrategieën: een classificatie”² has been applied.

² *Translation Strategies: A classification.*

Translation

EEN

Als ik in mijn jeugd alleen wilde zijn, klom ik in de stokoude appelboom achter ons huis, en op het dak boven de keuken. Daar, genesteld tegen de gevel van het portiek, het hoogste punt, zat ik over de gerstvelden naar de schepen in de riviermonding te turen, en droomde ik van avontuur en vrijheid³.

Hoogzomer was het mooist als de vaarroutes vol schepen waren en het hoofd van mijn leraar⁴ niet naar lesgeven stond. Die namiddagen bracht ik naakt in de zon badend door, terwijl ik de koopvaardijsschepen gadesloeg die stroomopwaarts naar Londen voeren of via de zee naar Gallië of Spanje of de Middellandse Zee gingen.

Ik was als kind een eenling, hoewel, als ik eraan terug denk, het niet vrijwillig was. Ik was eenzaam, en smachtte naar vriendschap. Maar mijn vader liet me niet spelen met de boerenknechten omdat zij hun werk moesten doen en ik het mijne. Hij voedde mij tot een Romeinse heer op, niet tot een boerenkinkel. En hoewel ik vaak genoeg tegen hem in ging onthield ik wel dat als ik er niet was geweest mijn moeder nog zou leven, en dat ik hem al genoeg overlast had veroorzaakt. Mijn moeder stierf in het kraambed, toen ik werd geboren. Hij had een afbeelding van haar in zijn studeerkamer, een kleine beeltenis op hout geveerd. Ik neem aan dat hij haar miste, hoewel hij daar nooit over sprak. Hij was een besloten, strenge en afstandelijke man. Voor het grootste deel was hij eigenlijk een vreemdeling voor mij. Maar ik kende hem goed genoeg om te weten dat hij geloofde in etiquette en ferme discipline, iets

³ Original: "Escape." In this sentence it seems Drusus does not refer to escape as *ontsnappen*, but instead seems to describe him going to other places. Therefore the term *vrijheid* seemed more fitting.

⁴ Original: "Mentor." Finding the exact definition of what Sericus is to Drusus was quite difficult, and in the end *leraar* was chosen because that is the most important function that Sericus fulfills.

waar ik, leek het, ongeschikt voor was. Voor hij me een pak slaag gaf, zei hij altijd tegen mij dat karakter met de roede wordt gevormd, als een zwaard onder een hamer.

Mijn enige echte gezelschap in die tijd was Sericus, mijn leraar. Hij zij dat hij liever met boeken dan met jongens werkte⁵, en hij was erg streng. Maar ik denk dat hij toch wel op gesteld was en dat hij alleen vanwege mijn vader zo streng was. Meestal liet hij me mijn eigen gang gaan. Wanneer hij dacht dat ik te lang weg was geweest, kwam hij me zoeken, en vanaf mijn uitkijkpost op het dak hoorde ik zijn stem in de binnenplaats terwijl hij de slaven vroeg waar ik was. Met een zucht trok ik mezelf dan omhoog, kroop ik over de zonverwarmde dakpannen, klopte ik mijn tuniek schoon toen ik weer beneden stond⁶, en ging ik naar de voorkant van het huis om Sericus te vinden.

Sericus was zelfs toen al een oude man. Hij was jaren geleden bij onze familie gekomen als mijn moeders leraar, toen mijn moeder nog een meisje was en woonde in haar vaders huis in het Gallische Autun. Sericus had haar het langst gekend, langer zelfs dan mijn vader haar kende⁷, en hij was het die haar weer tot leven bracht voor mij, als hij vertelde over haar glimlach, en hoe ze haar lange donkere haar naar achteren gooide als ze lachte⁸, en hoe ze al van me gehouden had toen ze me nog in haar buik droeg.

Ik kreeg nooit genoeg van deze verhalen en ik zal hem wel duizend keer hebben gevraagd om ze te herhalen. Ik geloofde toen dat, zolang ik haar duidelijk genoeg in mijn dromen zag, ze op magische wijze weer bij mij zou terugkomen.

Maar natuurlijk kwam ze nooit terug; geen magie in de wereld kan de doden weer tot leven

⁵ Original: "He said he preferred books to boys." There was an alternative translation, *Hij gaf de voorkeur aan boeken*, but that did not include the 'boys', and although this is a slightly loose translation, the intention of the source text is covered.

⁶ Original: "dust my tunic at the foot of the tree." Here the alternative translation was too literal, and by dismissing the tree this sentence worked better in Dutch.

⁷ Addition: *haar kende*. This was added to clarify.

⁸ Original: "and how she threw back her long dark hair when she laughed." This sentence was problematic in the sense that there might be another way to translate it in Dutch, but in the end this translation sufficed, although it might be slightly too verbal.

wekken, wat de christenen ook zeggen.

Dat jaar, het was bijna midzomer, begon iets zich af te spelen in het estuarium⁹; donkere, logge transportschepen, zwaar en langzaam terwijl ze onze mannen stroomafwaarts naar Gallië meevoerden¹⁰. Ik vroeg aan Sericus wie ons tegen de Saksen zou beschermen als ons leger in Gallië zat. Daarop gaf hij een kort antwoord en zei dat ik er met vader over moest spreken. Ik fronste, en boog mijn hoofd weer naar mijn wasbordje¹¹ en mijn opdrachten. Ik mocht niet naar vader tenzij ik ontboden werd, en Sericus wist dat goed.

Sinds ik me het kan herinneren ontvingen we belangrijke gasten in onze villa, aangezien mijn vader als de afgevaardigde van de keizer in Brittannië een belangrijk man was. We ontvingen een groot aantal graven en tribunen, dikke ambtenaren van financiën, rijke landeigenaars en bevelhebbers¹² uit de steden, die aankwamen in hun koetsen en met hun gewapende escortes. De huisknecht¹³ ontving ze aan de deur en begeleidde ze naar binnen en ik rende dan naar de binnenplaats, om met de wachtende soldaten te praten terwijl ze hun paarden droogwreven of bij de fontein rondhingen.

Het waren ruige mannen die naar zweet en leer roken; ze maakten grappen en spuugden en door mijn haar woelden, en ze voelden aan de kinderspieren in mijn bovenarmen en vroegen, terwijl de belangrijke heren binnen hun zaken bespraken, wanneer ik bij hen in het leger zou komen. Ze vertelden me allerlei verhalen over gevechten en exotische plaatsen ver van hier, en rommelden daarbij soms door hun plunjezak om een of ander prulletje voor me te vinden –

⁹ Original: “I began to see something new on the water of the estuary.” This has been translated in a more passive voice instead of the active that is used in the source text. Estuary was at first translated as *riviermonding* but to cover the meaning it has been changed to *estuarium*.

¹⁰ Original: “heavy and sluggish as they made their way in convoy downriver towards the sea, bearing our men away to Gaul.” This sentence has been translated in a more concise way, so the sentence would not become unnaturally long in Dutch. Some of the meaning has been lost but the sentence reads more natural.

¹¹ Original: “Wax-board.” This was used to practice writing and exercises in the antiquity, the Dutch equivalent being *wasbordje*. When doing research, this translation was used frequently, and therefore chosen for this translation.

¹² Original: “Decurions.” The decision here was whether to keep the Latin word or to translate it completely. In the end it was translated, since it fits better in the sentence.

¹³ Original: “Steward.” The difficulty with this particular word is that there isn’t a word in Dutch that covers the same meaning. Even though *huisknecht* does not cover the meaning completely and leaves out a bit of status, since a steward is a head of servants in the household, the current translation was preferred to *huisslaaf* or the more modern *butler*.

een scherf van een gebroken lamp, een primitief votiefbeeldje van klei, of een stuk geslepen glas – en ze zeiden dan dat het helemaal uit Spanje of Thracië gekomen was, of zelfs uit het zonoevergoten Egypte, ouder dan tijd.¹⁴ Ik wil wedden dat die aandenkens gewoon uit de dichtstbijzijnde herberg of kampementen kwamen. Toch zaten ze voor mij vol mysterie en beloftes, en ik zette ze op een rij op de vensterbank in mijn slaapkamer, waar ik naar ze zat te staren en zat te fantaseren over helden. We hadden onze eigen aanlegsteiger aan de rivieroever, bij een gehucht dat versterkt was om het tegen de zeerovers te beschermen. Vanuit daaruit werden elk jaar tijdens oogsttijd boten volgeladen met graan voor Londen. De rest van het jaar stopte er nauwelijks scheepvaartverkeer; maar een namiddag aan het eind van de zomer, toen ik op het dak lag te zonnen, zag ik hoe een legersloep plotseling uit de plotseling van koers veranderde en aanmeerde. Ik zag vervolgens twee mannen op paarden de onverharde weg op rijden¹⁵. Ze stopten even, als honden die een spoor zoeken, en reden toen tussen de gerstvelden door, terwijl ze hun paarden de sporen gaven en een wolk van stof en zand opwierpen. Ze galoppeerden onder de rij lindebomen naar ons huis toe, en reden met veel lawaai onze binnenplaats op – twee mannen in uniform, kaarsrecht als commandanten in het zadel.

Toen ze dichterbij kwamen zag ik echter dat ze de rankmarkering van hun tuniek gehaald hadden.

Ze riepen naar de stalknecht om te wachten; het zou niet lang duren. Toen liepen ze de treden naar het portiek op.

De stalknecht stond nog bij de fontein met de teugels in zijn hand toen de mannen terugkeerden. Ze stegen op, draaiden hun paarden en reden haastig onder de poort door.

¹⁴ Original: "Older than time." At first this clause was simply left out of the translation, since it seems like an unnecessary addition to the sentence, and it could not work well in Dutch. In the end it was put in as it is now.

¹⁵ Original: "I watched, and presently two men on horses appeared on the track." Not too much has been changed in this sentence, but the style of the current translation was more natural.

Terwijl ze hun paarden omkeerden keek een van de mannen op en ving mijn blik.¹⁶ Hij stopte even, fronste en schudde toen zijn hoofd. Daarna draaide hij zich om en reed hij weg.¹⁷

Ik wachtte even en voelde de eerste koude prikkels van angst in mijn nek. Er was een stilte neergedaald rond het huis, en ik wilde net naar binnen gaan toen er snelle voetstappen weerklonken op de grond.

Ik stak mijn hoofd achter de gevel vandaan en keek recht in het gezicht van Sericus.

‘Kom onmiddellijk naar beneden, Drusus,’ riep hij, ‘en snel; je vader wacht.’

Hij stond voor de hoge ramen van zijn studeerkamer toen ik door de slaaf werd binnengelaten, half weggedraaid over de gerstvelden uit te kijken. Hoewel hij me had moeten horen binnenkomen liet hij dit niet zien; dus moest ik wachten, met mijn armen langs mijn lichaam in de formele houding die mij geleerd was, de koude marmeren vloer onder mijn blote voeten. Ik bedacht me dat ik in mijn haast was vergeten mijn sandalen uit mijn kamer te halen. Daar zou hij wat op aan te merken hebben, en ook iets over mijn stoffige tuniek. Hij had daar altijd wel iets op aan te merken.

De stilte duurde voort en ik schuifelde wat ongemakkelijk met mijn voeten¹⁸. Uiteindelijk, omdat hij nog steeds niet had bewogen of me had erkend, zei ik: ‘Vader, ik ben er’¹⁹.’

Ik hoorde hoe hij inademde en vervolgens draaide hij zich plotseling om. Zijn gezicht was gehuld in schaduw, donker tegen het zonlicht; en alsof hij plotseling een doel voor ogen kreeg begon hij naar me toe te lopen, zo snel dat ik bijna dacht dat hij me wilde slaan. Maar ik wist

¹⁶ Original: “one of the men glanced up and caught sight of me looking down at him.” Originally this was translated as *zag dat ik op hem neerkeek*. This did not carry the same meaning as the source text, so it was changed into the current translation.

¹⁷ Original: “Then he looked away and was gone.” In Dutch the words *en verdween hij* do not quite fit in the setting, it seems to indicate someone would have disappeared in thin air. Therefore the alternative translation was chosen here.

¹⁸ Original: “The pause lengthened. I shifted uneasily on my feet.” This sentence read more natural as one sentence instead of two, even though the second sentence does not start with *but*.

¹⁹ Original: “Father, I am here.” For this sentence there were several translations that all put the emphasis on different parts: *Vader, hier ben ik*, *Vader, ik ben hier* and the current translation. Since this translation seemed the most general translation it was chosen over the other possibilities.

dat hij zoiets niet zou doen²⁰. Toen hij bij me kwam viel hij plotseling op een knie en greep hij mijn schouders vast, en streek hij over mijn haar en voorhoofd als een krankzinnige. Ik hield mijn blik op het wit ingelegde marmer gericht, bang en verward. Nooit in mijn leven had hij zulke emoties vertoond, of het nu blijdschap of woede was; zelfs niet wanneer hij me sloeg. Hij was altijd kalm en precies, als een man die paarden temde.

Toen hij probeerde te praten klonk zijn stem zo vreemd en gebroken dat ik naar hem opkeek en staarde. Zijn ogen waren vochtig, en zat water op zijn wangen. Ik denk dat mijn adem stokte, zo erg schrok ik ervan om mijn vader te zien huilen.

Wat hij ook in mijn gezicht zag, het zorgde ervoor dat hij zichzelf bedwong²¹. Hij ademde diep in en na een tijdje liet hij me los en richtte hij zich tot zijn volle lengte op.

Toen hij begon te spreken had hij zijn nonchalante stem teruggevonden, afgemeten en zakelijk.

‘Je bent te jong,’ zei hij, ‘voor wat ik je ga vertellen. Maar dit kan niet wachten, en ik wil dat je heel goed luistert. Vandaag had ik twee gasten, twee mannen gebonden aan mij door een oude vriendschap. Ze kwamen me waarschuwen. Het lijkt alsof onze nieuwe keizer niet langer tevreden met mij enkel van mijn positie te ontslaan²². Ik heb een oproep gekregen om naar het hof van Trier in Gallië te gaan om antwoord te geven aan bepaalde... vragen.’

²⁰ Original: “But I knew that was not his way.” A close translation of this sentence is somewhat unnatural in Dutch, therefore the current translation, which is not as close to the source text as its previous translation, is more fitting.

²¹ Original: “Whatever he saw in my face caused him to master himself.” *Zichzelf bedwingen* may not be an accurate translation of *to master yourself* but in this sentence it read more natural than *werd hij weer meester van zichzelf* or *kreeg hij zichzelf weer in de hand*.

²² Original: “relieve.” To relieve someone of their post seems like an euphemism here, but has been translated to the point in Dutch with *ontslaan*.

Hij pauzeerde daar, zijn gezicht verwrongen van ironie bij het laatste woord.

In mijn onschuld vroeg ik, ‘Wanneer komt u terug, heer?’ Ik had de taal van het hof nog niet leren spreken, waar elke verschrikking een mooie naam had.²³

Hij keek weg, en zijn blik gleed over de rijen boeken van zijn bibliotheek, en over het kleine vervaagde portret van mijn moeder op de plank.

‘Dat kan ik niet zeggen... Ik neem aan lang weg te zijn. Er moeten bepaalde maatregelen genomen worden. Ik stuur je naar je oudoom²⁴ in Londen, Lucius Balbus; hij is familie van je moederskant en hij zal voor je zorgen.’²⁵

Ik had nooit van die Balbus gehoord en ik wilde niet weggestuurd worden. ‘Maar heer!’ riep ik, ‘Sericus en de slaven kunnen voor me zorgen.’

Hij schudde zijn hoofd. ‘jij kan niet hier blijven. Ik heb Sericus opgedragen om met je mee te gaan vanwege je onderwijs. Negeer je scholing niet. Die dingen vindt Balbus in elk geval niet belangrijk; maar er is geen vrijheid zonder kennis.’²⁶ Hoe oud ben je nu?’

‘Veertien.’ Dat was iets wat hij nooit kon onthouden.

‘Nou, ik meen dat Balbus een zoon heeft van die leeftijd, en jullie zullen vast vrienden worden.’²⁷ Stop met staren als een dwaas en luister naar wat ik te zeggen heb. Ik vermoed dat jij in de toekomst voor moeilijkheden zal komen te staan: een man als ik heeft zowel vijanden als vrienden, en alleen op momenten als deze ontdekt men wie wat is. Jij zal ze zo goed als je kan moeten doorstaan; en bovenal, Drusus, hoop ik dat je niet vergeet dat je mijn zoon bent en dat je je daar naar gedraagt. Het ligt nu in je eigen handen om een heer te worden en om te

²³ Original: “where every horror bore a pretty name.” This could either be translated literally or on the basis of the meaning, creating a different expression. In this translation the first option has been chosen, since stylistically seen it works quite well too.

²⁴ Original: “great-uncle” here translated as *oudoom*, but is here meant to be the cousin of his mother.

²⁵ Original: “he is of your mother’s bloodline” translating *bloodline* directly in Dutch felt forced, therefore the current translation was preferred.

²⁶ Original: “there is no freedom without it” Here there was the extra addition of *kennis* instead of finishing the sentence with *het*. The alternative was *kennis is vrijheid* but that was too far from the message that Drusus’ father tries to convey.

²⁷ Original: “I believe Balbus has a son about that age, who will be a friend to you.” The translation that reads more like an assumption has been chosen deliberately. The translation that reads more like a statement did not fit stylistically seen.

leren wat dat betekent. Ga je nu voorbereiden. Je vertrekt vandaag, voor het vallen van de avond.

Ik stond daar stilletjes terwijl hij verder praatte over details die ik me niet kan herinneren.

Toen hij mijn blik zag brak hij zijn verhaal af en haalde hij diep adem.

‘Luister dan goed,’ zei hij, ‘en hoor van mij de waarheid, hoewel ik het je bij de goden liever had bespaard. Iemand in het hof, een of andere intrigant, heeft een aanklacht tegen mij ingediend en daarom moet ik nu naar het hof om me te verdedigen. Dat zijn nou mijn vijanden: kleingeestige²⁸ mannen die hun gezicht niet durven laten zien, die in de schaduwen hebben gewerkt aan mijn ondergang. In de tussentijd zal jij ergens anders veiliger zijn. Is dat duidelijk?’

‘Maar, vader,’ riep ik, ‘wat heeft u dan gedaan?’

‘Gedaan?’ Hij lachte bitter. ‘Ik heb enkel mijn plicht gedaan en de Keizer gediend. En nu dat hij dood is, ruziën zijn zoons over de erfenis zoals honden om een bot vechten. Mijn loyaliteit is mijn tenietdoening geweest, want loyaliteit aan de een is verraad voor de ander-‘

Hij stopte met praten, en met een ongeduldige handbeweging draaide hij weg en stond hij met zijn rug naar me toe, naast het donkere bureau.²⁹

‘Ga nu; de slaven zijn je spullen al aan het inpakken en Sericus staat te wachten.’

Zo eindigde mijn jeugd. Ik heb hem nooit meer gezien.

TWEE

We kwamen Londen via de zuidelijke buitenwijken van boerderijen en villa's en we stopten bij de drinkplaats bij de brug, waar de voermannen en palankijndragers verzamelden.

²⁸ Original: “Small men” here meaning small in spirit or in heart, not specifically physically small.

²⁹ Original: “the onyx desk” Here the word *onyx* indicates the colour of the desk. Since describing a desk as onyx-coloured in Dutch, *Onyxkleurig*, seems too forced, instead a broader translation has been chosen that does indicate the colour, but does not carry the specific meaning the word has in the source text.

Het huis van Balbus lag in het centrum van de handelarenwijk, naast de Timmermanstraat³⁰, dichtbij het heilige bos³¹ van Isis. Overal waren mensen. De warme lucht rook naar stof en ongewassen lichamen. Achter de straten galmden de werkplaatsen van hamerslagen, zagen en de beitelslagen van graveurs.

Een oude huisslaaf liet ons binnen. Hij vroeg naar onze spullen, die we in de wagen hadden gelaten, en zei dat ervoor gezorgd werd. Toen leidde hij Sericus weg en liet mij achter met een stuurs kijkende dienstmeid. Zij nam me mee langs kamers behangen met glanzende, gekleurde zijden gordijnen en volgestopt met druk, versierd meubilair. Maar mijn kamer was elders, op de bovenste verdieping net onder de dakbalken, kaal en laag en witgewassen.³²

‘Mevrouw³³ heeft gezegd dat u hier slaapt,’ mompelde de meid mijn ogen ontwijkend, terwijl ze langs me heen liep om de luiken te openen. Ik keek rond. Er stond een smal bed met een grijze spreid en in de hoek, onder een laag spinnenwebben, een wastafel. Voor de rest had een oude opslagruimte kunnen zijn. Het was een kamer die mijn vader zelfs niet aan de meest bescheiden gast had aangeboden.

Net op dat moment slaakte de meid een gedempte gil. De wind had het luik uit haar handen gerukt en het knalde nu tegen de buitenmuur. Het was niets ernstigs; toch keek ze om naar de deur en beet ze op haar lip.

‘Het is de wind maar,’ zei ik met een glimlach, om haar te kalmeren. ‘Hier, ik help je wel.’ Ik leunde naar buiten en zette de roestige sluiting vast. ‘Zo, het is al klaar,’³⁴ zei ik.

³⁰ Original: “Street of Carpenters.” Since there is no indication that this street is a specific street that still carries that name in London, translating the profession seemed to suffice.

³¹ Original: “grove of Isis.” The translation of *grove* was especially problematic here. Since a grove indicates a few trees, not a big forest, it was problematic to find a good translation. In the end *heilig bos* was chosen, even though it does not cover the intension of the original word and still is too broad.

³² Original: “whitewashed.” Even though the Dutch equivalent is *gewit*, this translations somehow read pleasantly and was therefore chosen.

³³ Original: “The Mistress.” Since there is no title in Dutch equivalent to *mistress*, *Mevrouw* was used here to indicate she is the lady of the house.

³⁴ Original: “See, it is done.” To translate this as *zie je, het is gedaan* would be very unnatural, so instead the current translation was chosen, so Drusus does in fact sound reassuring, as his intention is.

Ze knikte en richtte haar aandacht op de wastafel, waar ze het stof af haalde. Toen ik opgewekt vroeg of mijn tante thuis was verstijfde ze en stopte ze. Ze was zo angstig als een verstrikte vogel. Mevrouw, zei ze terwijl ze naar de vloer staarde, was aan het rusten in haar privékamers en mocht niet gestoord worden.

‘En mijn neef?’ vroeg ik, fronsend. ‘Waar is hij?’

‘Albinus is er niet, meneer. Hij is bij de bisschop.’

Haar stem was zo zacht dat het even duurde voordat ik begreep wat ze had gezegd.

‘Maar wat,’ vroeg ik verbaasd, ‘moet hij bij zo’n man?’ Ik had mijn vader horen praten over de christenen tegen zijn politieke vrienden. Ze waren bemoeizuchtige fanatiekelingen, zei hij, die altijd voor problemen zorgden. Ik wist ook dat de boerenknechten ze wegjoegen met stokken wanneer de rondtrekkende predikanten met hun fletse gezichten op ons land kwamen.

De meid keek snel naar me en keek toen weer weg, haar mond een strakke lijn alsof ik haar had verleid om meer te zeggen dan mocht.

‘U moet dat zelf aan hem vragen,’ antwoordde ze. Toen, voordat ik iets kon zeggen, liep ze snel weg. Ik luisterde naar haar vervagende voetstappen op de planken van de overloop en staarde naar mijn stoffige laarzen. Ik wreef in mijn ogen. Ik was moe; nu voelde ik het.

De vorige nacht waren we gestopt bij een armzalige herberg en hadden we op vieze bedden vol met luizen gelegen. Ik had aan Sericus gevraagd of de familie van de keizer echt zo vreselijk was dat we op deze manier moesten reizen, ons moesten kleden als simpel volk en ons als dieven moesten verbergen.³⁵ Hij zei alleen chagrijnig dat ik mijn mond moest houden; mijn vader had zijn redenen en we deden wat hij ons had bevolen.

Daarna liet ik hem met rust. Ik kon zien dat hij al ongelukkig genoeg was.

³⁵ Original: “that we must travel thus, dressed as backwoodsmen and hiding like thieves” The sentence structure was changed here, to make it more natural in Dutch. The alternative was to split the sentence, but that would result in an unnecessary wordy translation.

De vlooiën beten jeukten. Ik deed mijn laarzen uit en krabde aan mijn hiel. Het stadslawaai kwam door het open raam naar binnen, samen met de stank van ranzige houtskool gemengd met ganzenvet. Ik stond op en stapte naar het raam en keek naar buiten.

Onder mij, twee verdiepingen lager, groeide een zieke pruimboom op een grimmige, geplaveide binnenplaats, die probeerde met zijn takken naar het zonlicht te reiken³⁶; en terwijl ik daar stond liep de oude huisslaaf met zijn hobbelende looppas³⁷ door de zuilengang naar de keukens en bediendevertrekken achterin het huis. Toen hij ons binnenliet had hij gezegd dat mijn oom Balbus in de haven met zijn werk bezig was. Ik dacht terug aan de paar dingen die mijn vader over Balbus had verteld; Hij had gezegd dat Balbus een soort handelaar was die kocht en verkocht en in schepen handelde.³⁸ Maar, bedacht ik daarna, mijn vader had ook over mij niet veel goeds te melden. Dus misschien zouden mijn oom en ik elkaar toch wel aardig gaan vinden.

Een slaaf bracht water in een aardewerken pot. Ik deed mijn kleren uit en waste me bij de wastafel; toen kwam de meid aan de deur kloppen en zei dat mijn oom was teruggekomen en mij nu wilde zien.

Ik had iets moois willen aantrekken om te laten zien dat ik niet zomaar iemand was, maar mijn kist met kleren was nog niet gebracht dus uiteindelijk kleepte ik me, terwijl ik mezelf vertelde dat kleren niet de man maken, in dezelfde groezelige eenvoudige tuniek en probeerde er het beste van te maken.

³⁶ Original: “straining for the light” the part *met zijn takken* was added here for a clearer description.

³⁷ Original: “hurrying with his old-man’s gait” *hobbelende looppas* has a broader meaning than *old-man’s gait* but it seemed representational for the image that Waters is trying to describe.

³⁸ Original: “he was some sort of trader, whose business was ships, and buying and selling” Here the second part and the third part of the sentence have been switched.

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Source text (2966 words)

ONE

When I was a boy, and wanted to be alone, I would climb the ancient Apple tree at the back of our house, up onto the roof above the kitchens. From there, propped against the gable over the portico, where it was highest, I used to gaze out across the barley fields at the ships on the distant estuary, and dream of adventure and escape.

High summer was best, when the sea-lanes were busy and my tutor was in no mood for teaching. Then I would spend warm afternoons dozing naked in the sun, watching the merchantmen as they rode the tide upriver to London, or out seawards on their way to Gaul or Spain or the Middle Sea.

I was a solitary child, though I may say at the outset that this was not my own choice. I was lonely and yearned for friendship. But my father forbade me to play with the farmhands, saying they had their own work to do, and I had mine. He was rearing a Roman gentleman, not a country peasant. And though I disobeyed him often enough, I remembered that, but for me, my mother would still be alive, and I had already brought him enough trouble. For she had died in childbirth when I was born.

He kept a picture of her in his study, a small image painted on wood. I suppose he must have missed her, though he never spoke of it. He was private, stern, and remote. Indeed, in most ways he was a stranger to me. But I know well enough that he believed in decorum and firm discipline, for which, it seemed, I was ill suited. He used to say, before he beat me, that character is wrought with the rod, like a sword beneath the hammer.

My only real companion in those days was Sericus, my tutor. He said he preferred books to boys, and he had a strict air. But I believe he loved me all the same, and the strictness was just to please my father. He used to let me wander. But when he thought I had been away too long, he would come looking, and from my rooftop eyrie I would hear his voice in the courtyard, asking the slaves where I had gone. Then with a sigh I would pull myself up, pad across the sun-warm tiles, dust my tunic at the foot of the tree, and make my way to the front to find him.

Sericus was an old man even then. He had come into our family years before as my mother's tutor, when she was still a girl at her father's house in Gallic Autun. Sericus had known her longest of all, longer even than my father, and it was he who brought her back to life for me, telling me about her smile, and how she threw back her long dark hair when she laughed, and how she had loved me even when she was carrying me in her belly.

I never tired of these stories, which I must have asked him to repeat a thousand times. I used to think that if only I could see her clearly enough in my dreams, some magic would bring her back to me.

But of course she never came; for there is no magic that brings the dead back to the living, whatever the Christians say.

That year, near midsummer, I began to see something new on the water of the estuary: dark bulbous troopships, heavy and sluggish as they made their way in convoy downriver towards the sea, bearing our men away to Gaul. I asked sericus who would protect us from the Saxons, with the army gone. But he answered sharply and told me to speak to my father. I frowned at this, and bent my head to my wax-board and my exercises. One did not go to my father without being summoned, as Sericus well knew.

For as long as I could remember, high-ranking visitors had come to our villa, Father having been the emperor's deputy in Britain, and so an important man. We received a steady stream of counts and tribunes, fat finance officers, wealthy landowners, and decurions from the cities, with their soldier escorts and smart carriages. The steward would meet them at the door and usher them inside, and I would run to the courtyard and talk to the waiting soldiers as they brushed down their horses, or lounged beside the fountain.

They were rough men who smelled of sweat and leather; they joked and spat and tousled my hair, feeling the childish muscles in my arms and asking, while great men conducted their business inside, when I was coming to join them in the army. They would tell me stories of battles and exotic places far away, sometimes rummaging in their satchels to find some trinket for me – a fragment of broken lamp, a rough clay votive figure, or a shard of polished glass – saying it had come all the way from Spain or wild Thrace, or sun-baked Egypt, older than time.

I daresay, in truth, these mementoes had travelled no further than the nearest tavern or barrack-house. But for me they were full of mystery and promise, and I ranged them on the sill of my bedroom, where I would gaze at them and dream of heroes.

We had our own jetty on the water's edge, by a hamlet fortified against raiders from the sea. From there, each harvest time, we loaded barges with grain destined for London. For the rest of the year traffic seldom stopped there; but late one afternoon at the end of summer, when I was basking on the roof, I spotted a naval cutter veer suddenly from midstream and put in. I watched, and presently two men on horses appeared on the track. They paused, like dogs seeking a scent, then struck out through the barley fields, spurring their horses and throwing up a plume of dust behind, riding at a gallop under the avenue of limes that led to

our house, and clattering into the courtyard – two men in uniform, with the straight-backed poise of officers.

But when they were close I saw they had removed the marks of rank from their tunics.

They shouted for the groom, ordering him to wait: they would not be long. Then they strode up the steps under the porch.

The groom was still at the fountain with the reins in his hand when they returned. They mounted, wheeled their horses, and urged them away under the gateway. And, as they turned, one of the men glanced up and caught sight of me looking down at him. For a moment he paused, grim-faced, and shook his head. Then he looked away and was gone.

I waited, feeling the first cold fingers of fear creep in my hair. A stillness had descended on the house, and I was just about to return inside when hurried footfalls sounded on the ground below.

I craned my head over the cornice to see, and found myself looking straight into the face of Sericus.

‘Come down this instant, Drusus,’ he cried, ‘and be quick; your father is waiting.’

He was standing in front of the tall windows of his study when the slave admitted me, half turned away, staring out across the barley fields. Though he must have heard me enter he gave no sign; and so I waited, standing formally with my hands at my sides as I had been taught, feeling the cold of the marble floor beneath my feet and remembering that, in my haste, I had forgotten to fetch my sandals from my room. He would have something to say about that, and my dusty tunic too. He always remarked on such things.

The pause lengthened. I shifted uneasily on my feet. Eventually, when still he did not move or acknowledge me, I said, ‘Father, I am here.’

I heard him draw his breath, and then with a sudden movement he turned. His face was in shadow, dark against the sunlight; and, as if seized by some sudden purpose, he strode across the floor, so swiftly that I almost thought he intended to strike me. But I know that was not his way. When he reached me he suddenly dropped down on one knee and gripped my shoulders, and touched my hair and brow like a man deranged. I stared down at the white inlaid marble, confused and afraid. For never in my life had I known him show such feeling, either of joy or anger; not even when he beat me, when he was always calm and precise, like a man who breaks horses.

He made to speak, and his voice was so strange and broken that I looked up and stared. His eyes were shimmering, and there was water on his cheek. I think I even gasped out loud, for it shocked me beyond all reason to see my father crying.

Whatever he saw in my face caused him to master himself. He took a long breath, and after a pause released me from his grip and stood to his full height.

When he spoke again it was in his casual voice, measured and businesslike.

‘You are too young,’ he said, ‘for what I have to tell you. But it cannot wait, and I want you to listen carefully. Today I had two visitors, men bound by bonds of old friendship. They brought me a warning. Our new emperor, it seems, is no longer content merely to remove me from office. I am summoned to Gaul, to the court at Trier, to answer certain... questions.’

He paused, and his face twisted in irony at this final word.

In my innocence I asked, ‘When will you be back, sir?’ I had not yet come to know the language of the court, where every horror bore a pretty name.

He looked from me, casting his eyes over the stacked books of his library, and the little faded picture of my mother on the shelf.

‘I cannot say...I expect to be a long time. There are certain arrangements that must be made. I shall send you to your great-uncle in London, Lucius Balbus; he is of your mother’s bloodline, and he will take care of you.’

I had never heard of this man Balbus, and did not want to be sent away. ‘But sir!’ I cried, ‘Sericus and the slaves can look after me.’

He shook his head. ‘You cannot stay. I have instructed Sericus to accompany you, for your studies. Do not neglect your education. Such things are of no great concern to Balbus, by all accounts; but there is no freedom without it. How old are you now?’

‘Fourteen.’ It was something he never remembered.

‘Well, I believe Balbus had a son about that age, who will be a friend to you. Now stop staring like a fool, and attend to what I say. I suspect, in the future, you will encounter difficulties: a man like me has enemies as well as friends, and only at times such as this does one discover which is which. You will have to face them as best you can; and through it all, Drusus, I hope you will remember you are my son, and bear yourself accordingly. It is in your own hands now to make yourself a gentleman, and to learn what that means. Now prepare yourself. You leave today, before nightfall.’

I stood in silence, while he talked on, details I cannot recall. But then, seeing my eyes on him, he broke off and drew a long breath.

‘Listen then,’ he said, ‘and hear the truth, though be the gods I would spare you this. Someone at court, some intriguer, has brought a charge against me, and I must go to answer it. Such are my enemies: small men, who dare not show their faces, who have worked in the shadows to bring me down. In the meantime you will be safer elsewhere. Is that clear?’

‘But, Father,’ I cried, ‘what have you done?’

‘Done?’ he gave a bitter laugh. ‘I have done my duty and served the emperor. And now that he is dead, his sons squabble over their inheritance, like dogs fighting for a bone. My loyalty has

been my undoing, for loyalty to one is treason to the other-’

he ceased, and with an impatient motion of his hand turned away, and stood with his back to me, beside the great onyx desk.

‘Now go; the slaves are already packing your things, and sericus is waiting.’

So ended my childhood. I never saw him again.

TWO

We came to London through the open suburb of farmsteads and villas to the south, halting at the watering-place by the bridge, where the carters and litter-bearers gather.

The house of balbus lay in the heart of the merchants’ quarter, off the Street of the Carpenters, close by the Grove of Isis. Everywhere was crowded. The hot air smelled of dust and unwashed bodies. Behind the street the workshops sounded with the noise of hammers and saws and engravers’ chisels.

An old house-slave admitted us. He asked after our things, which we had left with the wagon, and said they would be fetched. Then he took Sericus off, leaving me with a sullen-looking servant-girl. She led me past rooms hung with bright silk draperies, and cluttered with fussy, gilded furniture. But my room was elsewhere, on the uppermost floor below the rafters, bare and low and whitewashed.

‘The Mistress says you must sleep here,’ mumbled the girl, avoiding my eye and stepping past me to open the shutters. I glanced about. There was a narrow bed with a grey coverlet, and, in the corner, below a festoon of cobwebs, a washstand. But otherwise it might have been some old attic store. It was not the kind of room my father would have offered to a guest, however humble.

Just then the girl let out a small, smothered cry. The breeze had snatched the shutter from her hand, sending it banging against the outer wall. It was a small enough thing; but she glanced back at the door, biting her lip.

‘It’s just the wind,’ I said, smiling to put her at her ease. ‘Here, I’ll help you.’ I leant out and secured the rusty catch, saying, ‘See, it is done.’

She nodded, then turned to the washstand and busied herself with the few things there, brushing off the dust. I asked brightly if my aunt was at home, and at this she stiffened and paused. She was as timid as a snared bird. The Mistress, she said, staring down at the floor, was resting in her private rooms, and must not be disturbed.

‘And my cousin?’ I asked, frowning. ‘What of him?’

‘Albinus is out, sir. He is at the bishop’s.’

Her voice was so low that it took me a moment to realize what she had said.

‘But what,’ I asked, staring, ‘has he to do with such a man?’ I had heard my father talk of Christians to his political friends. They were meddlesome zealots, he said, always stirring up trouble. And I knew the farm-hands drove them off with sticks, whenever their whey-faced wandering preachers came onto our land.

The girl looked quickly at me, then looked away, her mouth setting firm, as if I had lured her into saying more than she ought.

‘You must ask him yourself,’ she answered. Then, before I could speak again, she hurried off. I listened to her footfalls recede along the boards of the passageway, and sat staring down at my dusty boots. I rubbed my eyes. I was tired; I felt it now.

The night before, we had put in at a wretched off-road inn, and lain on filthy beds full of fleas. I had asked Sericus if the emperor’s family were really so terrible that we must travel thus, dressed as backwoodsmen and hiding like thieves. But he had told me crossly to hush; my father had good reason, and we were doing as he had ordered.

After that I had left him be. I could see he was unhappy enough already.

The flea-bites were sore. I pulled off my boots, and scratched at my heel. The city noise was carrying in, and with it the stench of rancid cooking, charcoal mixed with goose fat. I got up and padded to the window, and looked out.

Below me, two floors down, a sickly damson tree was growing in a grim, paved court, straining for the light; and as I looked the old house-slave passed under the colonnade, hurrying with his old-man's gait towards the kitchens and the servants' quarters at the back. He had said, when he admitted us that my uncle Balbus was out at the docks, attending to business there. I thought of how my father had spoken slightly of Balbus, saying he was some sort of trader, whose business was ships, and buying and selling. But then, I reflected with a shrug, my father had little good to say of me either. So perhaps, after all, my uncle and I should like one another.

A slave brought water in an earthen jar. I stripped, and washed my body at the basin; and presently the girl came tapping at the door, and told me my uncle had returned and would see me now.

I had wanted to dress in something fine, to show I was not just nobody. But my clothes-chest had not yet come, so in the end, telling myself that clothes do not make a man, I pulled on the grimy homespun tunic once more, and made the best of it.