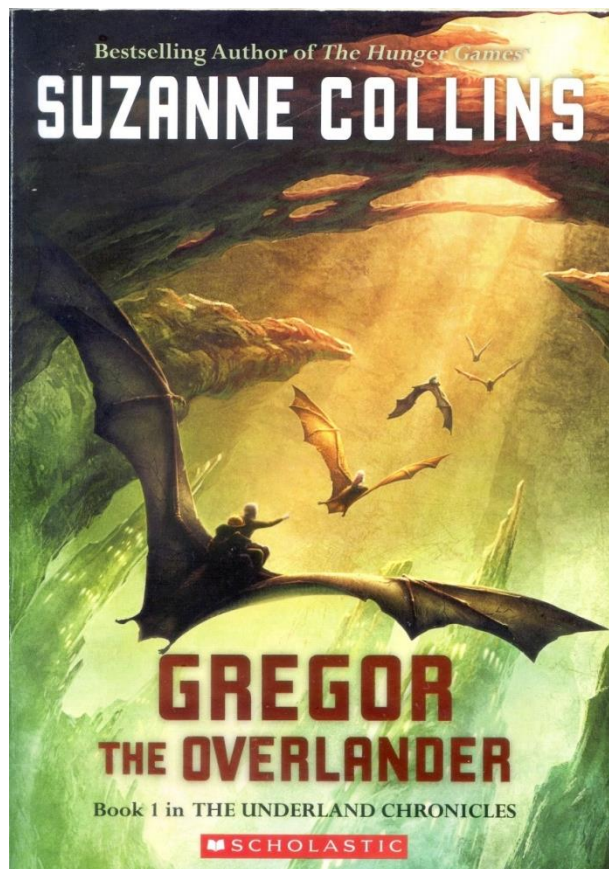


# Finding My Way Through the Underland

## Translation Problems and Their Solutions in Children's Book *Gregor the Overlander*



Cover photo: Collins 2003

Name	Jacobine Los
Student number	3706958
Supervisor	Cees Koster
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## Introduction

American author Suzanne Collins is mostly famous for her young adult *The Hunger Games* trilogy. However, this is not her first work, since, prior to this, she wrote for children's television shows, which inspired her to write children's books. Thinking one day about Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, she was intrigued by the idea of what Alice might have found if she would have fallen through a hole in a big city like New York, instead of in rural England. "In New York City, you're much more likely to fall down a manhole into the sewer than a rabbit hole, and if you do, you're not going to find a tea party. What might you find?" (Collins 2003: 314). This train of thought resulted in Collins writing the five-part book series *The Underland Chronicles*: a series about an eleven-year-old boy called Gregor who, with his two-year-old little sister Boots, has adventures in a world underneath New York, called the Underland. In this thesis, we will focus on the first book of the series: *Gregor the Overlander*. This book tells the story of Gregor and his sister Boots falling through an air vent in the laundry room of their flat in New York and landing in the Underland, where they meet the inhabitants of the city Regalia, as well as giant, talking cockroaches, bats, rats and spiders. The Regalians tell Gregor they think him to be the anticipated warrior, who would come from the Overland to bring an end to the war with the rats and was foretold centuries ago by the first person to come down to the Underland.

This children's novel features certain translation problems, which will be the topic of this thesis. First of all, we will look at the overall translation problems that occur when translating children's literature. The second chapter will give an analysis of *Gregor the Overlander*. I will analyse the book on a macro-structural level and discuss themes, story and plot and the characters. Thirdly, I will analyse *Gregor the Overlander* on a micro-structural

level where I will discuss the stylistic features of this book causing translation problems. I will focus on the unusual speech uttered by several characters. The fourth chapter will discuss the translation of names of certain characters of the book. The final chapter will be about the translation of culture specific elements in this story. These chapters will lead to the answer to the following research question: what translation problems occur when translating Suzanne Collins' *Gregor the Overlander*, what are the possible solutions to these problems and which of these are the preferable solutions? Finally, I will translate a certain part of this book in line with the answer to this research question.

# Chapter 1: Translating Children's Literature

Before having to look at the translation problems that occur in *Gregor the Overlander*, we will look at translation problems that specifically arise when translating children's literature. The opinions of several scholars who have written on this subject will feature in this chapter.

## 1.1 Children in the adult's perspective

Unlike with literature written for adults, writers and translators of children's literature do not merely have to answer to the audience they intended to write their books for. Some children's books – mainly those belonging to the canonized literature – are read by children as well as adults, which results in the difficulty of writing for two different audiences. Even the children's books that are only read by children have the opinion of adults to answer to. It is adults who decide what children like to read. It is adults who decide which children's books are good for children. It is adults who decide which books will be published. Children do not have much of a say in these matters. All this is decided through an adult perspective of how children perceive stories (Oittinen 2000: 48-9). Writers and translators of children's literature therefore seldom have free reign when writing for children, since society will always be looking over their shoulder.

Society's influence on this subject is shown in Zohar Shavit's *Poetics of Children's Literature* where it is stated that translators of children's literature are at liberty to edit the source text, provided the translation is in accordance with

the following two principles on which translation for children is based: an adjustment of the text to make it appropriate and useful to the child, in accordance with what

society regards (at a certain point in time) as educationally 'good for the child'; and an adjustment of plot, characterization, and language to prevailing society's perceptions of the child's ability to read and comprehend.

(Shavit 1986: 113)

Both principles are based on society's view of children. As Shavit states, the interpretation of these principles can change over time. Ideas about what is good for the child and what the child is able to read and comprehend differs from time to time. However, the interpretation of these principles is not the only aspect that changes over time; the hierarchal relation of these two principles also depends on the time we are living in. The educational principle has been dominant in the past, but nowadays "although to a certain degree the first principle still dictates the character of the translations, the second principle, that of adjusting the text to the child's level of comprehension, is more dominant" (Shavit 1986: 113).

## 1.2 Educational norms

Although the principle of the child's level of comprehension and his or her reading abilities is considered more important than the principle of what society believes to be good for the child, "educational norms [still] play a special role in the translation of children's literature" (O'Sullivan 2005: 82). The source text is converted into the values of the target culture.

This leads to translation practices and strategies in which those agencies involved (translators themselves, editors, programme planners), anticipating the reaction of intermediaries (adult buyers, booksellers, teachers, etc.), delete or cleanse elements regarded as unsuitable or inappropriate in the target culture, especially accounts of



supposedly unacceptable behaviour which might induce young readers to imitate it. Examples of such interventions are: changes of characterization and conduct [and] 'correcting' the creative use of language in translation (including deliberate misspellings).

(O'Sullivan 2005: 82)

Some translations of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Långstrump*, known in English speaking countries as *Pippi Longstocking*, provide an example of changes of characterization and conduct. In the source text, Pippi is playing with pistols and she asks her friends Tommy and Annika whether they would like one as well. In some translations, this scene was altered, because it was considered to be "unacceptable in the target culture because they celebrated disrespect for adult authority and ridiculed the rules and norms of child-rearing and civilized society" (O'Sullivan 2005: 83). However, altering this scene by making Pippi tell Tommy and Annika that pistols are not suitable for children – as is done in the German version, according to O'Sullivan – affects the character Lindgren created: it "is in complete contrast to her characterization, since only just before this point Pippi was quoting such moralizing with anarchic irony as she picked up a pistol and fired it at the ceiling" (O'Sullivan 2005: 83). Such a change in the main character can affect the plot and it is therefore questionable whether this translation method is desirable. Another option could have been to not translate the book in the first place, if it appears to be unsuitable in the target language. In fact, this is what happened in Arab countries. Lindgren's book had not been translated into Arab for a long time "because children's books in those countries are expected either to teach obedience or to be in the Oriental fairy-tale tradition" (O'Sullivan 2005: 85). Thirty years ago, however, the attitude towards Pippi's behaviour had changed so much, that revised

translations were published in Germany. “This example shows how conduct regarded as unacceptable in a source text may be modified in translation, and how after a lapse of time, during which the norms have shifted, it can be brought back closer to the original text” (O’Sullivan 2005: 84).

When it comes to changing the text’s “integrality”, Shavit mentions two criteria to do so: “first, the norms of morality accepted and demanded by the children’s system; second, the assumed level of the child’s comprehension” (Shavit 1986: 122). The easiest way to manipulate the text is to delete “undesirable elements or whole paragraphs” (Shavit 1986: 122). However, in some cases, deletion might have drastic consequences for the development of the plot, which makes it an undesirable action. Moreover, it is debatable whether we should want to delete “undesirable elements”. It is once again questionable whether adults should be the ones who are to decide which elements are undesirable and should be deleted. After all, “we understand child behaviour from an adult perspective and condemn as ‘unsuitable’ scenes that the child might regard quite differently” (Oittinen 2000: 48-9). For instance, adults might decide what is too scary for a child, but “[w]e may never know exactly what arouses fear in our children, because we, as adults, see the world from a different, grown-up perspective” (Oittinen 2000: 49). The other criterion Shavit mentions – regarding the “assumed level of the child’s comprehension” - is also influenced by adult’s view on children: “[w]hen a translator assumes that a certain paragraph will not be understood by the child, he will either make changes or deletions to adjust it to the ‘appropriate’ comprehension level” (Shavit 1986: 123). In this case, it is up to the translator or publisher to decide what is within the child’s comprehension level. The comprehension level will be discussed further later on.

Another example O'Sullivan mentions when discussing educational norms to be considered when translating children's literature, is the use of misspellings. "Misspellings, a feature of children's language, are a favourite source of humour in children's books. The comedy often arises from the sense of superiority of the readers, in the process themselves of learning to spell, towards mistakes that they no longer make, and the fact that they recognize them as mistakes at all" (O'Sullivan 2005: 87). This feature occurs often in A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*. When Pooh wants to visit the wise Owl for advice, he stumbles upon the following two notices at Owl's door:

Underneath the knocker there was a notice which said:

PLES RING IF AN RNSER IS REQIRD.

Underneath the bell-pull there was a notice which said:

PLEZ CNOKE IF AN RNSR IS NOT REQID.

These notices had been written by Christopher Robin, who was the only one in the forest who could spell [...]. Winnie-the-Pooh read the two notices very carefully, first from left to right, and afterwards, in case he had missed some of it, from right to left.

(Milne 1974: 55-6)

The misspellings in this passage are evidently intended, since the misspelling in the first notice is even being misspelled in the second notice. Moreover, Milne makes more remarks about the peculiar spelling in the following sentences. Christopher Robin was the one who had to write the notices, because he was considered to be the only one who could spell, although he clearly could not spell. Children will probably also recognise Pooh's reading of

the notices from right to left as being ridiculous, as a mistake they do not make themselves, for they know English is not read from right to left. According to O'Sullivan, some of the first translations of *Winnie-the-Pooh* did not feature the misspellings, since they were corrected into correct spelling. Apparently, it was thought to be best for young readers to only encounter correct spelling (O'Sullivan 2005: 88). Later on, these corrections were rectified, which once again proves that views on what is or is not desirable in children's literature change. In the case of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, preserving the misspellings is preferable over the translation method of correction, since Pooh's lack of knowing correct spelling corresponds with his character of being "a bear with very little brain" (Milne 1974: 100).

Another case of misspelling, although less easily recognisable as such, can be found in Michael Bond's *More about Paddington*. Paddington Bear decides out of boredom to decorate his room, but he spells the word decorating as 'deckerating' (O'Sullivan 2005: 88). In the first German translation, this was translated in correct spelling: "[t]he author's playful use of spelling is interpreted – or rather misinterpreted – as a mistake and removed in translation, which means that the bear's childness but also his independence from authority, symbolically represented by his incorrect spelling, are brought under control" (O'Sullivan 2005: 88). The correcting of misspellings are primarily due to the "educational norms in the target culture, but differing degrees of comic talent and linguistic creativity among translators are also factors" (O'Sullivan 2005: 88).

In *Gregor the Overlander*, misspellings also occur: they are uttered by Gregor's two-year-old sister Boots. Moreover, the cockroaches in the story use ungrammatical language. How these non-standard forms of language are translated, will be discussed in chapter three.

### 1.3 Competence level of the reader

Children's reading habits change over the years. As the child grows older, he or she becomes interested in different themes, or is able to read more complicated texts (Coillie 1999: 50; my translation<sup>1</sup>). It is just as important for the translator to keep the age of their target audience in mind as it is important for the author to keep the age of the source audience in mind. In the Netherlands, there is a level system which helps find the right book for the individual reader's needs: the "AVI-niveaus" (Coillie 1999: 77). Through age six to ten, children will walk through the different levels, which are constructed by looking at the amount of syllables per word and words per sentence (Coillie 1999: 77).

Nearing the end of primary school, most children are able to read every children's book in terms of difficult words and long sentences, but from that point on, the literary competence plays a bigger role. "Middle school students are notorious for having negative attitudes toward reading and for limited voluntary reading" (Worthy et al. 1999: 12). This is partly due to the fact that they are not used to reading literature: at first, their literary competence is limited (Witte 2008: 1). However, as they read more and grow older, they will become better at understanding literature and at the end of secondary school, their literary competence is very elaborate and they are able to read very complex texts (Witte 2008: 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from sources in Dutch are mine.

The translator always has to keep the age and the competence of his audience in mind. When deciding which translation method to use for a certain problem, the reading and literary competence of his or her audience will steer the translator in a certain direction.

#### 1.4 Comprehension level of the reader

The examples from *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *More about Paddington* above show that “although to a certain degree the [educational] principle still dictates the character of the translations, the second principle, that of adjusting the text to the child’s level of comprehension, is more dominant” (Shavit 1986: 113). However, intervening on behalf of the competence of the child reader

overlooks the fact that children’s receptive abilities at any specific stage are not empirically established entities but hypothetical constructs. [...] We cannot speak of ‘the child reader’, any more than we can speak of ‘the reader’ in general. The literary competence of every child depends on his or her individual affective and cognitive development, influenced by factors of the maturing process and his or her social background, education, etc.

(O’Sullivan 2005: 91)

When discussing the literary comprehension level of the child reader, Shavit states that “translators have to make sure that they [...] reduce the proportions between elements and functions and make less elements carry even fewer functions [... as] the norm of simple and simplified models is still prominent in most children’s literature” (Shavit 1986: 125). As an example, Shavit mentions how Lewis Carroll makes it impossible to tell whether Alice’s

adventures in *Alice in Wonderland* happen in a dream or in reality. As children struggle to tell dreams from reality, this element was undesirable according to some translators, who made it clear in their translations that Alice was having a dream (Shavit 1986: 125).

It is questionable whether changing such literary elements is desirable. We are running the risk of underestimating a child's level of comprehension when facing something new. "Everything that children do not yet know and are experiencing for the first time is initially strange or foreign to them" (O'Sullivan 2005: 93). Although cultural differences are not the only reason for foreignness, they pose problems that occur often. Translators of all kinds of literature need to decide how to translate these culture specific elements, also known as CSEs. The translator has to decide whether to preserve the reference to the source culture – known as "foreignization" – or replace this reference with something similar from the target language – known as "domestication" (Munday 2012: 218-9). This choice reflects the struggle O'Sullivan mentions when it comes to translating children's literature: it is "a balancing act between the adaptation of foreign elements to the child reader's level of comprehension, and preservation of the differences that constitute a translated foreign text's potential for enrichment of the target culture" (O'Sullivan 2005: 74).

Some people might argue that foreign elements cannot be preserved in children's literature, due to the comprehension level of the child reader. However, it turns out that children have their own way of coping with foreign elements in their books.

[I]n reading – as in life – children are always being confronted by elements that they do not yet grasp and cannot understand, and so, in the process of learning to read, if it is a successful one, young readers can develop strategies that help them to cope

with such things: they skip something that is incomprehensible to them or refuse to allow minor disruptions to interrupt the flow of reading.

(O'Sullivan 2005: 95)

Moreover, it is not only the elements referring to the source culture that are foreign to children. Children are often confronted with impossible situations when reading books. Their ability to use their imagination prevents children from being confused by the magical world of fairy tales. Many impossible events happen and many non-existing characters appear in such stories. Nonetheless, children accept fairy tales and they do not think these foreign elements are weird; those elements do not ruin their fun in reading or being read these books. O'Sullivan quotes Arabic translator Walif Saif, who says that "in the child's world of ... imagination, expectations are not constrained by cultural limits, so that a strange name or a strange place would not necessarily derive its strangeness from breaking culturally established norms" (O'Sullivan 2005: 94). Children are therefore apparently not easily taken aback by foreign elements in their literature.

A major realisation of culture specific elements that occurs in almost every story is the use of proper names. When it comes to translating these culture specific elements, Aixelá differentiates between two subcategories: conventional and speaking proper names (Aixelá 2010: 199). Conventional proper names are considered meaningless, randomly chosen by the author without referencing to anything. By contrast, speaking proper names do carry different levels of meaning. Some are obviously chosen to match the character, others contain subtle references to cultural or historical elements (Aixelá 2010: 199). Usually, conventional names remain untranslated, or they might be transformed to fit the



conventions of the target language, and speaking names are more likely to be translated, especially in children's literature, for children might be less perceptive to the references than adults, since children might be less familiar with the source language than adults.

An example of translating speaking proper names can be found in the Dutch translation of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Many names in these books are speaking names which correspond to the characters given those names. For instance, Alastor Moody, one of the teachers at the wizarding school, is nicknamed after his handicap of having one artificial eye: 'Mad-Eye'. When he first enters the story, he is described as follows:

But it was the man's eyes that made him frightening. One of them was small, dark and beady. The other was large, round as a coin, and a vivid, electric blue. The blue eye was moving ceaselessly, without blinking, and was rolling up, down and from side to side, quite independently of the normal eye – and then it rolled right over, pointing into the back of the man's head, so that all they could see was whiteness.

(Rowling 2000a: 163-4)

Regardless of his appearance, students are also frightened of him because of his demeanour. He always seems to be in a bad mood, which he takes out on the students, and he is rather unpredictable. Rowling therefore choose his nickname as well as his surname with great care: they reflect his personality. In addition, both names go well together because of the alliteration. In the Dutch translation, Wiebe Buddingh' decided to translate the name in order for the joke to be clear to the young audience. Dutch children might recognise the word 'eye' in his name, so they might be able to see the reference in the nickname, but the 'moody' joke might be lost on them. The Dutch name "Dwaalooog

Dolleman” reflects the teacher’s weird eye as well as his moodiness and unpredictability, while the name still sounds catchy due to the alliteration (Rowling 2000b: 145).

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, we will look at the translation of the speaking names Boots and Ripred. Since their personality is portrayed in their names, as is the case in the above mentioned example of Mad-Eye Moody, the decision of how to translate their names cannot be made without considering all possible methods.

We have discussed several restrictions translators face when translation children’s literature on the educational as well as the competence and comprehension level. In the next chapters, we will see how these restrictions affect the translation of *Gregor the Overlander*.

## Chapter 2: *Gregor the Overlander*

In this chapter, an analysis of *Gregor the Overlander* will be given. We will discuss the storyline, audience, genre and theme of the story as well as some of the characters.

### 2.1 Story

The first story of *The Underland Chronicles* tells the story of the eleven-year-old Gregor who lives in present day New York with his grandmother, mother and two sisters: seven-year-old Lizzie and two-year-old Boots. His father disappeared over two and a half years ago. During summer holiday, when Gregor is doing laundry with his two-year-old sister Boots, both of them disappear through an air duct into a world situated underneath New York: the Underland. This world is filled with extraordinary ordinary things. You can find all the pests New Yorkers deal with – cockroaches, rats, spiders, bats – but the animals in the Underland are bigger than humans and they can talk. Even the humans who live in the Underland look different: their pale skin, silvery hair and weirdly coloured irises are probably due to the lack of sunlight they suffer from by living underground.

Upon arriving in the Underland, the ruler of the Underlanders, Vikus, informs Gregor his dad arrived in the same world when he mysteriously disappeared, but was taken prisoner by the rats shortly after arriving. When the Underlanders think Gregor is their long awaited warrior mentioned in an old prophecy, he sees it as a chance for him and his sister to go on a quest to rescue their father, accompanied by some Underland inhabitants: princess Luxa and her cousin Henry and their bats, and the cockroaches Temp and Tick. As the quest continues, more Underlanders join the group, as was foretold by the prophecy, and Gregor is starting to

feel the weight of pretending to be the warrior. He struggles with the question of whom to trust in this strange world. On top of that, the prophecy turns out to be telling the truth more often than not, which puts pressure on Gregor to bring himself, his little sister and his dad home safe, since the prophecy also states that four out of the twelve people involved in the quest will not survive the journey.

## 2.2 Audience

With an eleven-year-old being the protagonist of the story, the intended audience is probably around the same age. Different reviews give different age indications, but they all vary between the ages of eight and fourteen: children who are in their last years of primary school, or have just started secondary school. A lesson plan on this book even suggest that the teacher makes the children look up “words with dark connotations”, such as “monstrous”, “annihilation”, “eerie” and “queasy”, implying children of that age are not familiar with the connotations of these words (“Gregor”). When looking at the literary competence of children who just started secondary school, Witte says that “the structure of the story is clear and simple and the exciting or dramatic scenes come in rapid succession” (2008: 2).

Dutch children of the age of eleven will not have had many English classes. Although many primary schools teach some English, it is often not much more than a few basic words and sentences: they will not learn much about English culture before they go to secondary school. This lack of foreknowledge of the source text culture will influence decisions to be

made when faced with this book's translation problems. We will see this in the next few chapters.

## 2.3 Genre and Theme

### 2.3.1 Fantasy

There are two types of fantasy when discussing fantasy literature: high fantasy which is "set in a secondary world [...] as opposed to [l]ow [f]antasy which contains supernatural intrusions into the 'real' world" (Wolfe 1986: 52). *Gregor the Overlander* is therefore a high fantasy story, since it takes place in a secondary world.

From a young age, children hear fantasy stories; think of how often adults read them fairy tales, for example. "Until they reach school age, children are offered little else on almost a continuous basis" (Pierce 1993: 50). Fantasy makes children think about their own world.

Fantasy [...] is a literature of *possibilities*. It opens the door to the realm of 'What If', challenging readers to see beyond the concrete universe and to envision other ways of living and alternative mindsets. [...] Intelligent readers will come to relate the questions raised in these books to their own lives. If a question nags at youngsters intensely enough, they will grow up to devise an answer – to move their world forward, because ardent souls can't stand an unanswered question.

(Pierce 1993: 50)

Collins' series of *The Underland Chronicles* also raises questions amongst the readers: "Do the ends justify the means? Does might make right? Is there such a thing as a just war?" (Smith 2012).

This never-ending world of possibilities created by fantasy also leads to the reader believing everybody can be a hero.

Fantasy, more than any other genre, is a literature of empowerment. In the real world, kids have little say. This is a given; it is the nature of childhood. In fantasy, however short, fat, unbeautiful, weak, dreamy, or unlearned individuals may be, they find a realm in which those things are negated by strength. The catch – there is *always* a catch – is that empowerment brings trials.

(Pierce 1993: 51)

These trials often lead fantasy novels to feature the element of dystopia.

### 2.3.2 Dystopia

Suzanne Collins is most famous for her *Hunger Games* trilogy. Although these books are written for young adults and *The Underland Chronicles* are more likely to be read by slightly younger children, there is a parallel to be drawn between the two series.

Collins' novels have become enormously popular among teenagers, no doubt in part because of the perennial appeal of dystopian fiction for young adults. [...] Dystopian fiction, it has been argued, is popular among teenagers because it resonates so deeply with the adolescent experience.

(Latham and Hollister 2014: 34)

The element of utopia and dystopia occurs frequently in fantasy novels (Hintz and Ostry 2003: 1). “Utopias for young readers suggest that children can achieve a state of ideality that adults cannot; at times, the impetus for the fictional child to fix society’s problems exerts a powerful pressure on the child itself.” (Hintz and Ostry 2003: 8). This notion can be found in *Gregor the Overlander*: the Underland is at war and its inhabitants believe the young Gregor to be the foretold warrior to end this war. Gregor tries to convince them he is not the person they were waiting for, but no-one believes him. Gregor has more responsibility than the average eleven-year-old; he is forced to grow up in a hurry. This makes the contrast between Gregor and his sister Boots even bigger: the eleven-year-old who has more responsibility than he thinks he is able to handle, and the two-year-old carefree girl who is hardly scared of anything, simply because she is too young to see the danger of the situation. Her carefree view on things sometimes makes Gregor jealous of his sister and long to be home, where he will be taken care of by his mother, instead of having responsibility himself. The dystopian setting of this story therefore helps portray the characters of Gregor and Boots.

### 2.3.3 Trust

“[D]ystopia can act as a powerful metaphor for adolescence. In adolescence, authority appears oppressive, and perhaps no one feels more under surveillance than the average teenager” (Hintz and Ostry 2003: 9-10). A theme that occurs frequently in dystopian stories, is the theme of trust. Collins especially likes using this theme: in the Hunger Games trilogy, the protagonist is so frequently told what to do, that she often has to ask herself whom to listen to and whom to trust.

In *Gregor the Overlander*, the protagonist also struggles with whom to trust.

Although Gregor is the warrior, another character is appointed as the leader of the group: the rat Ripred. King Vikus himself told Gregor and the Underlanders that Ripred is to be trusted, but trusting someone who used to be the enemy is easier said than done. Gregor and the Underlanders do not know what to do with his authority, and whether to trust him or not. This theme is therefore important to the portrayal of Ripred's character and to the storyline, since it keeps the reader on the edge of his or her seat till the end of the story.

## 2.4 Characters

Some characters are more relevant to discuss than others when examining translation problems in *Gregor the Overlander*; I will only discuss the most relevant characters.

### 2.4.1 Boots

The young age of Gregor's two-year-old sister Boots is important to the storyline. First of all, her young age gives her advantages in the issues of trust and fear. When Gregor does not trust the bats enough to let them be in control of the flying, the Underlanders explain how they themselves can be so trusting:

"You must trust the bats. They will not drop you," said Luxa. "It is the first lesson we teach the babies." [...]

"It is easier for the babies," said Mareth quickly. "Like your sister, they have not yet learned much fear. We have a saying down here. 'Courage only counts when you can count.' Can you count, Boots?" Mareth held his fingers up before Boots, who was busy trying to tug off Gregor's sandal. "One...two...three!"



Boots grinned and held up her pudgy fingers in imitation. “No, me! One...two...free...four seven ten!” she said, and lifted both hands in the air at her accomplishment.

(Collins 2003: 141)

Boots’ lack of negative experience with people results in her thinking that “everybody in the world was her friend. Gregor sometimes wished he could be more like that” (Collins 2003: 51-2). Because of her indiscriminate view of all creatures, she treats everyone equally. The ruler of the Underlanders even believes “‘Boots to be a natural ambassador,’ said Vikus, smiling. ‘She treats all with an equality I myself aspire to’” (Collins 2003: 196). Her ability to treat every animal as equal, results in her befriending the cockroaches, which makes them willing to come along on the quest. Since the cockroaches are required according to the prophecy, Boots’ attitude is vital for the success of the quest.

Boots’ childlike manner of speaking serves as a constant reminder of her young age to the reader. For instance, when she addresses her brother, she says “Ge-go” and when she want out of her crib, she says “me out” (Collins 2003: 5). This form of speech refers to her young age and is therefore important to her character portrayal and the storyline. Her speech will be analysed in the next chapter of this thesis.

## 2.4.2 Cockroaches

The cockroaches are portrayed as slave-like creatures. Other creatures in the Overland see them as an inferior lifeform.

“What makes the roaches think they can believe the rats?” asked Gregor.

“The crawlers do not think in the same manner we do,” said Vikus.

“How do they think?” asked Gregor.

“Without reason or consequence,” Henry broke in angrily. “They are the stupidest of creatures in the Underland! Why, they can barely even speak!”

(Collins 2003: 156)

The fact that most Underlanders have no regard for the roaches, makes it all the more special that Boots treats them as equals, which is essential to the quest. The roaches' status is therefore important to the storyline. Since their low status is reflected in their speech, this language helps portray their characters and creates an effect which must be brought on to the translation. Their speech will be further discussed in the third chapter.

### 2.4.3 Ripred

The rat Ripred is another important character to the storyline. The rats are the enemies in *Gregor the Overlander*, but Ripred is no ordinary rat. The leader of the Underland tells Gregor that Ripred is to be trusted, but Gregor is not convinced. He is a vicious fighter; something that Gregor realises on their first encounter:

The rat turned his glowing eyes on him, and Gregor was shocked by what he saw there. The intelligence, the deadliness, and, most surprisingly, the pain. This rat was not like Fangor and Shed. He was much more complicated and much more dangerous. For the first time in the Underland, Gregor felt completely out of his league. If he fought this rat, he wouldn't stand a chance. He would lose. He would be dead.

(Collins 2003: 205)

Ripred leads the quest, but Gregor does not know for sure whether to trust him or not. So Ripred's character is important to the theme of trust.

His mysteriousness is also reflected in his speech. He uses formal speech with difficult words and complicated sentences, which make him more difficult to understand and therefore more mysterious. We will take a look at his speech in the next chapter.

Apart from his speech, Ripred's character is also portrayed in his speaking name. Red being the colour of blood and rip referring to his ability to rip his enemies apart, makes this character look like someone to be afraid of, just by his name. Since Gregor is indeed a little afraid of Ripred and not sure whether or not to trust the rat, this name is significant for his character and the storyline. Possible translation methods for his name will be discussed in chapter four.

In the following chapters, we will look at how the information given in the previous two chapters will influence the decision of which translation method to use when dealing with translation problems in *Gregor the Overlander*.

## Chapter 3: Non-standard Language

When reading *Gregor the Overlander*, the use of non-standard speech catches the eye. This chapter will focus on dialect and idiolect and how these occurrences should be translated in this novel.

### 3.1 Dialect and idiolect

Leech and Short make a distinction between dialect and idiolect:

Linguists have used the term dialect for varieties of language which are linguistically marked off from other varieties and which correspond to geographical, class or other divisions of society. A dialect is thus the particular set of linguistic features which a defined subset of the speech community shares; idiolect refers, more specifically, to the linguistic 'thumbprint' of a particular person: to the features of speech that mark him off as one individual from another.

(Leech and Short 2007:134)

Sometimes, "eye-dialect" is used in literature, "where the impression of rendering non-standard speech by non-standard spelling is pure illusion" (Leech and Short 2007: 135). We have seen an example of this in the first chapter where we speak of O'Sullivan mentioning Paddington who spells the word 'decorating' as 'deckerating' (O'Sullivan 2005: 88). The non-standard spelling makes it look like Paddington makes a mistake, which is true in spelling, but not in pronunciation.

Similarly in many novels, lower-class characters ‘pronounce’ and as an’ or ‘n. But this is a reflection of an elision which occurs naturally in English speech, without respect to dialect. Even a BBC announcer will say ‘cats ‘n dogs’. If we meet such a non-standard spelling in fiction, it is its non-standardness that strikes us, not the supposed phonetic reality behind it.

(Leech and Short 2007: 135)

So, although eye-dialect cannot be considered an actual dialect, Hatim and Mason distinguish between several kinds of dialects, which “overlap considerably”: geographical, temporal, social and standard dialects. (1990: 40-3). Another form of what they call “user-related variation” of language, is idiolect: “the individuality of a text user” (Hatim and Mason 1990: 43). “It has to do with ‘idiosyncratic’ ways of using language – favourite expressions, different pronunciations of particular words as well as a tendency to over-use specific syntactic structures” (Hatim and Mason 1990: 43-4). In literature, this individual version of dialect is therefore important to the portrayal of certain characters. The effect created by a character’s particular form of idiolect helps to give the reader an idea of what type of person this character is.

One’s idiolectal use of language is not unrelated to one’s choice of which standard, geographical, social or temporal dialects to use. It is also linked to the purpose of the utterance and will ultimately be found to carry socio-cultural significance

(Hatim and Mason 1990: 44)

## 3.2 Non-standard language in *Gregor the Overlander*

When dealing with non-standard language in literature

[o]ne of the factors to be reckoned with is the distancing and stigmatising effect of using non-standard forms of language, including deviant spellings. The very fact of using such forms implies that the character deviates from the norm of the author's own standard language.

(Leech and Short 2007: 136-7)

Collins differs three characters in *Gregor the Overlander* from the other characters by deviating them from the norm of the author's own standard language. Gregor's little sister Boots is much younger than the other characters, which is reflected in her utterances; the rat Ripred is more intelligent and mysterious than the other characters, which can be seen in his use of obscure language; and the cockroaches Temp and Tick are less intelligent and of a lower class than the other characters, which is shown in their grammatically incorrect sentences. Boots' and Ripred's non-standard languages are idiolects, since they are used only by these individuals.

Idiolect can also be an expression of character, an aspect of the fictional world which deserves a great deal of attention in itself. [...] [I]n novels, as in real life, a person's motives and character are inferred from outward behaviour: from actions, from demeanour, and also from speech.

(Leech and Short 2007: 137)

How the characters of Ripred and Boots are expressed through their idiolect will be explained below in the separate discussions of their idiolects.

By contrast, the cockroaches' language can be called a social dialect, as is it used by all the cockroaches and it represents a certain class within the Underland.

### 3.2.1 Cockroaches' language

Not unlike in the Overland, the cockroaches are treated as vermin in the Underland. They are the lowest lifeforms in society and nobody treats them with the same respect other creatures are treated with. Their low status is reflected in their language: they use grammatically incorrect sentences. To make sure the characters are portrayed in the target text as they are in the source text, to create the same effect in the target text as in the source text, the cockroaches should speak grammatically incorrect Dutch as well. We will look at the language of two cockroaches that occur frequently in the story, Temp and Tick, and see how their language differs from grammatically correct English. Then we will look at how the grammatically correct Dutch translation should be adjusted to create the same effect.

There are four grammatical errors that occur in the cockroaches' form of speech, shown in four examples below. At the beginning of a question, the first two words are sometimes in the wrong order (1); they do not use auxiliaries (2); almost every sentence ends with a tag question like repetition (3); they do not conjugate the verb 'to be' (4).

(1) Smells what so good, smells what? (Collins 2003: 18)

(2) No, Princess, we eat not now. (Collins 2003: 155)

(3) Closer come can we, closer come? (Collins 2003: 19)

(4) Be she princess, Overlander, be she? (Collins 2003: 19)

Leaving aside the small repetition at the end, which we will discuss later on, the first sentence is grammatically correct apart from the first two words; 'what smells so good?' would be a grammatically correct sentence. This word order mix-up can easily be translated into Dutch: instead of saying 'wat ruikt hier zo lekker?' the cockroaches would say 'ruikt wat hier zo lekker?'. The target text reader can still understand the question, though he or she will think the sentence structure is odd, just like the readers of the source text.

In the second sentence, the auxiliary verb is omitted, which leaves a grammatically incorrect sentence. This is, however, not as easily translated into Dutch as the first sentence, since auxiliary verbs are not always used in the same situations in Dutch as they are in English. When we would translate (2) into 'Nee, prinses, wij eten niet nu', there would not officially be anything wrong with the sentence. To create a sentence that sounds less natural, the translator might use a sentence with a Dutch auxiliary and then omit it. The translation would then be: 'Nee, prinses, wij nu niet eten', where the word 'gaan' is omitted between the words 'wij' and 'nu'. With this translation, the reader will think there is something missing in the sentence, like the source text reader will think of Collins' text.

The third example shows a repetition of the first two words at the end of the sentence. Although this happens in almost all their speech – in affirmative sentences as well as in questions – this occurrence feels like a tag question. "A tag question is a brief structure that is 'tagged onto', i.e. added to the end of a preceding clause or sentence. Tag questions are typical of the spoken language and serve to invite the addressee's agreement or disagreement with the preceding statement" (Mackenzie 2007: 94). This non-standard speech can be translated by repeating the first two words of the translated sentence, or as tag questions by using words such as 'toch' or 'nietwaar'. This last option would be a good



method to show the insecurity the cockroaches have and how they always look for the addressee's agreement or disagreement. It would make them look more like slaves, waiting to be told what to do, than creatures who make decisions themselves. However, translating these occurrences as tag questions would become difficult when the sentence is not a question. The sentence "I be Temp, I be" (Collins 2003: 150) would give a different portrayal of Temp's character than the translation 'Ik ben Temp, toch'. This translation indicates that Temp doubts his identity, though this is not the case in the source text. Since this is a rather big change to his character, this is not a preferable translation. I would therefore opt to not translate these occurrences as tag questions, since they cannot be used everywhere and the cockroaches are rather consistent using this form of speech. The preferable translation of these repetitions would be to once more use the first two words of the sentence, as is done in the source text. Sentence (2) could then be translated as follows: 'Komen dichterbij mogen wij, komen dichterbij?'. (In this case, I chose to invert the words 'komen' and 'dichterbij', because the sentence would become grammatically correct at the end if it were to be translated into 'Dichterbij komen mogen wij, dichterbij komen?'.)

The fourth grammatical error is the use of the verb 'to be'. The cockroaches do not conjugate this verb, but they only use the infinitive form. Were the translator to translate this verb with only the infinitive form in Dutch as well, this might cause problems in some situations. When translating sentences like "I be Temp" (Collins 2003: 150), there is no problem and the sentence can be translated as 'Ik zijn Temp'. The reader would realise the wrong conjugation is used and will see this as a grammatical error. In sentence (4), however, translating "be" with 'zijn' might be confusing to the reader: when reading 'zijn zij prinses?', the reader might think 'zij' is correctly used as a third person plural and that the grammatical

error lies within the singular word 'prinses'. The reader might become confused because he or she does not know who this other person is the cockroaches are speaking of. Since this target text will cause more confusion than the source text, I believe this is not a preferable translation. I would rather go for 'ben zij prinses?', which still uses the wrong conjugation of the verb, but does not cause more confusion than the source text does.

### 3.2.2 Ripred's language

Ripred's language differs from the other characters' language in register. His idiolect is very important for the portrayal of his character. His high register of difficult words and complicated sentences makes him mysterious, which makes it questionable for Gregor and the reader whether to trust this rat or not. His form of speech is therefore important to maintain in the translation, since the way his character is viewed is important to the storyline.

Let us look at an example. The Underlander Luxa is explaining to Gregor how certain things work in the Underland. They are discussing the bond between bats and their riders: Underlanders and their bats have to take an oath and are bonded for life. She explains to Gregor that the one breaking that bond will be banished to live alone in the Underland, which no-one would survive. While Gregor and the reader try to deal with this information, Ripred rudely interrupts them as follows:

(5) Fascinating as your native rituals are, do you think we might proceed in silence?

Given that the entire rat nation is on the lookout for us, it might be prudent

(Collins 2003: 233)

This reaction shows us how Ripred is: a little rude, using difficult words and complicated sentences, and also always thinking about the danger that lies ahead. If this was phrased without difficult words and sentence structures, Ripred would simply be rude. His choice of words, however, shows how intelligent he is. It is therefore important to translate this with words of a high register as well:

Hoe fascinerend jullie inheemse rituelen ook zijn, denken jullie dat het wellicht mogelijk is deze reis in stilte voort te zetten? Aangezien het gehele rattenvolk naar ons op zoek is, is dat wellicht wijs.

In the next example, Ripred's choice of words makes him sound sarcastic and a little rude. When princess Luxa wants to let him know they can take care of themselves by telling him they already killed five rats, he replies as follows:

You mean the idiots that I handpicked for cowardice and ineptitude? Oh, yes, bravo, Your Highness. That was a masterly piece of combat.

(Collins 2003: 207)

In this passage, Ripred shows his disrespect for the princess, by telling her in a sarcastic manner that she did well. In Dutch, there is an additional way to show this disrespect in Ripred's choice of words. When translating the first "you" with "je", which would be logical to say for an adult who does not think much of a girl, and translating "Your Highness" with "Uwe Hoogheid", the use of "u" seems less sincere. This is an additional way of showing Ripred's disrespect, which very much suits his character. The translation of the passage could be as follows:

Bedoel je de idioten die ik zorgvuldig heb uitgekozen vanwege hun lafheid en dwaasheid? O, ja, bravo, Uwe Hoogheid. Dat was een meesterlijk staaltje vechtkunst.

### 3.2.3 Boots' language

Boots' idiolect is also important to the storyline: her age of two is reflected in her speech and is the reason she easily trusts people, has no fear and treats everyone as equals – including the cockroaches, whom no-one seems to treat as equals. In this dystopia, she is the portrayal of how people should treat each other in an ideal world. Since her age is so important to her attitude, her age should also remain reflected in her speech.

Let us take a look at some examples to see how Boots' age is reflected in her speech.

- |              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| (6) Ge-go!   | (Collins 2003: 5)   |
| (7) I seepy  | (Collins 2003: 163) |
| (8) Beeg bug | (Collins 2003: 16)  |

The examples show that she mainly speaks in utterances that consist of only a few words. Examples (6) and (7) show that at her age, she is not able to pronounce all letters. In her brother's name, the 'r' is omitted and utterance (7) misses the letter 'l'. Example (8) illustrates how Boots' sometimes stretches her vowels.

Because Boots' utterances are so short, it is not always possible to maintain the same sort of incorrect language for each utterance. The translator would have to translate every sentence into Dutch child language, whether it features that problem or not. In sentence (6), the same problem arises, since many Dutch children cannot pronounce the 'r' at the age of two either (Jansma and Harpman 1997: 45). The Dutch translation can therefore remain the

same as the English utterance. In sentence (7), however, the Dutch word 'moe' does not feature an 'l', so the translator cannot show in this example that Boots' is incapable of speaking that consonant. Still, this method is preferable to choosing a word that does feature the letter 'l', such as 'slaperig', which could be made into 'saperig'; due to the number of syllables, this word does not belong in the vocabulary of a two-year-old, so that would be an unrealistic translation. There is another way in which the translator could use child language in utterance (7): by translating the word "l" into 'ikke' instead of 'ik': 'ikke moe'. Example (8) also features a register problem: "bug" is a small and easy word, but the Dutch translation 'insect' would be less obvious for children to use. I would therefore opt for translating this with 'beestje' – which would become 'beesie' in child language – instead of 'insect'. Consequently, I would translate example (8) as 'goote bees'.

These examples show how the translator has to look at every single sentence and translate it into Dutch child language instead of translating the incorrect usage directly.

### 3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the idiolect and dialect used in this book can cause translation problems, but they are not insurmountable. The translator has to let go of the idea of translating every strange use of source language with an equally strange use of target language: it is more important to get the same effect across in the target text. It is not always possible to translate every incorrect use of language in Boots' short utterances, but in others it is possible to add one which is not present in the source language. We have also seen this happen in Ripred's speech. With the cockroaches' language it was not always

possible to translate certain ungrammaticalities into the same ungrammaticalities in Dutch. However, it was always possible to change something in a grammatically correct Dutch sentence to make it grammatically incorrect, which led to the same effect as in the source text: the cockroaches are viewed as a low lifeform in the Underland's society. As long as the translator is able to maintain the same effect in the target text as in the source text, the reader of the target text has the same view of the characters as the reader of the source text, which is most important when translating speech of round characters.

## Chapter 4: Names

In this chapter, possible translation methods will be discussed for the translation of certain names in *Gregor the Overlander*.

### 4.1 Translating names in children's literature

As said in the first chapter, there is a difference between conventional and speaking proper names: conventional proper names are chosen randomly, while speaking proper names match the character or refer to cultural or historical elements (Aixelá 2010: 199). For translating proper names, Jan van Coillie gives several translation methods, which are given below:

1. "Non-translation, reproduction, copying"
2. "Non-translation plus additional explanation"
3. "Phonetic or morphological adaptation to the target language"
4. "Translation (of names with a particular connotation)"
5. "Replacement by a name with another or additional connotation"
6. "Replacement of a personal name by a common noun"
7. "Replacement by a counterpart in the target language (exonym)"
8. "Replacement by a more widely known name from the source culture or an internationally known name with the same function"
9. "Replacement by another name from the target language (substitution)"
10. "Deletion"

(Van Coillie 2006: 125-8)

The last five of these methods are not relevant to discussing translating the names Boots and Ripred in *Gregor the Overlander*. Methods six to nine only function when it involves a name that is usual in the source language, which is not the case for Boots and Ripred and the final method cannot be used in this situation because Boots and Ripred are too important as characters to delete from the story. The first five methods, however, will be discussed below.

The advantage of the first strategy is that copying a name is that it is loyal to the source text. This loyalty makes many translators choose to maintain the names used in the source text. However, some feel that the alienating effect it has on the reader of the translation “could make it difficult [for children] to identify with the characters. Moreover, original names that are (too) difficult to read may spoil the mere pleasure of reading” (Van Coillie 2006: 125). Apart from the pleasure of reading, not translating names might result in a different character portrayal to the reader of the target text compared to the reader of the source text. “If a name refers to a character trait or the profession of the person in question (as is often the case in children’s books), the image called up in the reader’s mind is different and the name may not have the same emotional or divertive effect” (Van Coillie 2006: 125).

When a translator decides to maintain the name, but at the same time wants to avoid a different effect on readers of the source and target text, he or she can opt for an additional explanation. This can be done either in the text itself, or in a note. This additional explanation, however – especially when put in a note – draws the reader’s attention to the fact he or she is reading a translation. The translator becomes more visible and the reader’s flow might be interrupted. Moreover, when the name contains a certain connotation or a



play on words which is explained by the translator, “the divertive function changes as well: once explained, the pun is often no longer funny” (Van Coillie 2006: 126).

When the translator wishes to maintain the original names, but does not want the names to be too difficult for the reader to read, he or she can choose the third method: to phonetically or morphologically adapt the name to the target language. This way, the reader stays quite loyal to the source text, while not making the target text reader stumble over phonetically unfamiliar and therefore perhaps difficult names.

“When names have specific connotations, it is common practice to reproduce that connotation in the target language. [...] In such cases, the functions are preserved: in principle the names retain the same denotation and connotation; they evoke the same image and aim to produce the same humorous or emotional effect” (Van Coillie 2006: 127-8). A downside of this method is that it is less loyal towards the source text. The advantage, however, is that - in comparison to the non-translation methods - the reader of the target text is more likely to have the same image of the character as the reader of the source text.

Sometimes a literal translation of a name with a certain connotation does not suffice. In order to maintain the same emotional connotation, the translator can use a non-literal translation: Van Coillie mentions the translation of Roald Dahl’s *Matilda’s* “Miss Honey as *juffrouw Engel* (Angel), rather than *juffrouw Honing*” (2006: 128). Maintaining the same connotation for the target text reader as for the source text reader is a desirable effect, however, it also has a downside. This method can result in the translator adding more connotations than the writer of the source text did, or explaining more that the writer of the

source text did and therefore deprive the reader of the target text of the challenge the original writer has set for the reader.

## 4.2 Names in *Gregor the Overlander*

We will now discuss the translation of speaking names of two characters from *Gregor the Overlander*: Gregor's little sister Boots and the rat Ripred.

### 4.2.1 Boots

Let us examine these methods in a context: which of these methods is the preferable one when translating the name "Boots" in *Gregor the Overlander*? At the first occurrence of her name, Dutch readers might not understand what it means. However, after thirty pages, Gregor explains to some of the Underlanders why his sister is called Boots:

"My name's Gregor. And that's Boots," he said, pointing to his sister. "Well, her name's not really Boots, it's Margaret, but we call her Boots because in the winter she steals everybody's boots and runs around in them and because of this musician my dad likes." That sounded confusing even to Gregor.

(Collins 2003: 30)

It feels as if Collins uses the second method in the source text to make sure everyone knows where Boots' name comes from. The translator can still add an extra explanation, since the story of Boots stealing people's boots during winter will not be much of an explanation to people who do not know what this word means. However, the translator will be less visible when explaining the name in this situation than when there would be no explanation in the

source text. A possible translation using the additional explanation method could be as follows:

“Nou, ze heet niet echt Boots, ze heet Margaret, maar we noemen haar Boots, het Engelse woord voor laarzen, omdat ze in de winter ieders laarzen steelt en erin rondrent en vanwege een of andere muzikant die mijn vader leuk vindt.” Dat vond zelfs Gregor verwarrend klinken.

The added clause might make the sentence even more incoherent than the sentence in the source text, but that does not have to be an issue in this situation: the explanation sounded confusing even to Gregor.

Another option is the third method: to phonetically or morphologically adapt the name to the target language. When Dutch children see the name Boots in a Dutch book, they are likely to pronounce it as /bo:ts/ instead of /bu:ts/, which will probably lead to an association with the Dutch word “boot”. When the translator wishes to avoid this association with the Dutch word for boat, he or she can opt to change the spelling to “Boets”, to make the target text reader use the same pronunciation as the source text reader. However, it is debatable whether this method is desirable. As mentioned before, Boots’ name is explained as early as on page thirty and children will likely stop associating this name with the Dutch word for boat. Moreover, when Dutch children learn that “Boets” is the English word for “laarzen”, they might think it is spelled the English way and they might learn the wrong spelling. Furthermore, this spelling makes an English word look Dutch, which leads to a mashup of the two languages. Although the word is maintained in some

sense, instead of translated, the connection to the English name will be lost due to the Dutch spelling. This is therefore not the preferable method in this situation.

The fourth method is what Van Coillie calls the translation method, which is used for names with a particular connotation. In the case of Boots, the name could be translated as Laarzen. However, Dutch nicknames are usually never in plural. Moreover, Dutch nicknames for small children are often diminutives. When the translator chooses foreignization by translating the name, he or she should translate this name with “Laarsje” rather than “Laarzen” to create a proper Dutch nickname. Regarding the reference to the musician: translating Boots’ name will not cause a translation problem on that point, since it is not a reference to a well-known musician. Although there is a musician that goes by the name “Boots”, “[h]e first gained recognition in 2013”, which makes it impossible for this Collins to refer to him in a book written in 2003 (“Boots”). The reference is therefore more likely to occur in the explanation of Boots’ name to make it sound more confusing, than to refer to a specific musician. Consequently, it does not matter whether an English or Dutch name is used in this situation.

The method of replacing the source text name with another or additional connotation does not apply to Boots’ situation. By changing her name, the translator would also have to change the explanation of why she has that name – which is given to the Underlanders by Gregor – and consequently unnecessarily change her history. The idea that this is a strange name still applies when translating this name directly, so the target text reader does not lose a connotation which could be sustained when translated with another connotation. This method is therefore not preferable in this situation.

Discussing these different methods leaves us with two possible translation strategies in the case of Boots' name: maintaining the name Boots, while adding an additional explanation in the explanation Collins already gives for her name, or translating her name with the Dutch word 'Laarsje'. I have a preference for the first option: it remains closer to the source text. The target text readers will still understand what her name means, since Collins provided us with an explanation in which a quick translation can be given. When there is no argument to be made on the subject of target text readers not comprehending the name, I prefer to stay close to the source text. Moreover, this way, Boots' name fits Gregor's name best: the combination Gregor and 'Laarsje' within one family would sound like two languages clashing.

#### 4.2.2 Ripred

Ripred's name is treated differently by the author than Boots'. Boots' name is treated as strange and in need of an explanation; this explanation makes it easier for the translator to add an explanation in a subtle manner. However, such an explanation is not given in Ripred's case: his name is treated as a regular name. Nonetheless, Ripred's name does have a connotation important to his character. Ripred is a fierce fighter, as shown earlier. 'Rip' refers to him being able to rip his opponents apart and 'red' refers to the blood shed when he fights. His name functions as a warning: you do not mess with someone like him. This image adds to Gregor's trust issues with him. If Gregor trusts Ripred, but he turns out not to be trustworthy, Ripred might kill them all. This connotation of his name is therefore important for his character and the theme of trust. This connotation will probably be lost on young Dutch readers. The method of reproduction is therefore not preferable.

The second method uses reproduction with an additional explanation. The additional explanation would have to explain the connotation, or translate the name, maintaining the connotation. However, when this done in a footnote for example, the translator would become more visible and the reader would be pulled out of the flow of reading. In my opinion, this is not the preferable method, since there has to be a translation of the name in some sort to provide the explanation, and the reader would be less disturbed in his or her reading flow when this translation is used in the story itself. The fourth or fifth method would therefore be better options.

The third translation method does not apply to this situation: the name Ripred is pronounced the same in English as in Dutch, so a phonetic adaptation is not necessary. Neither is a morphological adaptation necessary, since the name does not occur in either language and therefore does not have to be adapted to feel natural in the target language.

The fourth method is the translation method for names with a particular connotation. Since the connotation is probably lost on the young Dutch reader when reproducing the name, this method seems like a logical option. When translating quite literally, the translator would go for 'Scheurrood'. This sounds like a gruesome enough name for this character. The only downside to this translation is that the alliteration of the 'r' is lost. Maybe if this name is not translated so literally, the alliteration can be preserved.

When we want to preserve the alliteration, the connotation has to be slightly altered. This is the fifth method. Some options came to mind when browsing the dictionary. First of all, the name 'ransrood' in which 'rans' would refer to 'afranselen'. However, when reading this word, the word 'ranzig' also springs to mind, which would give Ripred more the image of

a homeless person than a fierce warrior. This does not fit his character. Another option is 'Roemrood'; this would show that he wins all his battles. However, 'roem' has a positive connotation and does not sound as evil as 'rip'. The name 'Roemrood' would cause fewer trust issues than 'Ripred' and since trust is a theme of the book, this would not be a preferable translation. 'Roofrood' could also be considered as an option, though it would suggest more of a thief than a warrior and would therefore slightly change Ripred's character. A more preferable translation would be 'Ruigrood'. The character trait 'ruig' suits the fighting technique 'rip' and it suggests that this animal should be taken seriously. This translated name with a slightly different connotation still fits Ripred's character and would therefore be a good translation.

### 4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that when translating speaking names, the translator is guided by the competence and comprehension of the target text reader. To make sure the target text reader has the same information about the characters that the reader of the source text has, the translator has to explain the names Boots and Ripred. However, this chapter has also shown that there need not be only one option: Boots name was easily maintained because of the explanation already given by Collins, while it was preferable to translate the name Ripred into 'Ruigrood'. This shows that no two situations are exactly alike, and that the translator will have to make a new decision in every new situation.

## Chapter 5: Culture Specific Elements

In this chapter, we will discuss the translation of culture specific elements in *Gregor the Overlander*.

### 5.1 Culture specific elements

A translation problem that occurs in almost every text is the problem of translating culture specific elements - henceforth called CSEs. CSEs are “those textually manifest elements of which the function and connotations in the source text present a translation problem when translating it into a target text, because the referred element does not exist or has a different intertextual status in the culture system of the readers of the target text” (Aixelá 2010: 198).

There are many different ways to translate CSEs. Grit shows eight different strategies:

1. Preservation
2. Calque
3. Approach
4. Description or definition in the target language
5. Core translation
6. Adaptation
7. Deletion
8. Combination of strategies

(Grit 2010: 192-3)



When using the preservation strategy, the CSE is maintained from the source text to the target text. It can sometimes be adapted to the target language on a phonetic, orthographic or morphological level. This method is mostly used when dealing with an audience that is already familiar with this term, either through foreknowledge or the term being mentioned earlier in the text (Grit 2010: 192). When the term is being used for the first time in a text, Aixelá also opts to add an explanation, either in the text itself or in an additional note (Aixelá 2010: 201). However, longer sentences or footnotes can cause an interruption of the reading flow, which is undesirable.

The calque strategy - in other words, loan translation – is only possible when the CSE in the source text is a word or compound of words that exist in the target text: in that case, the word or words are translated ‘literally’ (Grit 2010: 192). This method cannot be used in every situation: sometimes the loan translation is still incomprehensible to the reader of the target text. This method should only be used when the audience has the proper foreknowledge, or when the translation is completely transparent. Translating “Koninkrijk der Nederlanden” with “Kingdom of the Netherlands” will not cause much difficulties, but when translating “Staten-Generaal” with “States-General”, the reader is still has to have foreknowledge of the Dutch culture to know what this means (Grit 2010: 192).

When using the approach method, the translator chooses a similar expression from the target language as a translation (Grit 2010: 192). This strategy can be used when the overall impression of the situation is more important than the exact semantics; in technical language, however, this method is undesirable, since the semantically incorrect translation can give the wrong impression (Grit 2010: 192).

The description method is a more preferable strategy when a translator wants the target text reader to know the exact denotation as well as connotation. The difficulty with this method, however, is to put this wordy description in the target text in a natural way, without pulling the reader out of his reading flow (Grit 2010: 192-3).

A core translation focusses on the denotation by only translating the core of the meaning. Usually, a hypernym is used (Grit 2010: 193). With this strategy, the translator analyses the denotation of the source text CSE, and when certain elements are not necessary to know for the target text readers, they are deleted and only the core element is used (Grit 2010: 193). The translator must be aware when using this strategy, that frequent usage of this method may cause the target text to be stylistically more dull than the source text (Grit 2010: 193).

The adaptation strategy is all about the target language: it is more of a translation of the function than of the language content (Grit 2010: 193). When dealing with an audience that has foreknowledge, this method might irritate the audience (Grit 2010: 193). However, when dealing with a child audience, this method might prove very useful: because of their lack of foreknowledge, source text words will predominantly sound foreign and they will not know what they mean, while naturalised words will help them understand the text the way the author of the source text intended.

The deletion method can only be used when the denotation of the CSE is irrelevant to the target audience (Grit 2010: 193). Since this chapter will discuss CSEs that cause translation problems, this method will not be used in this chapter. The final strategy – a combination of the strategies – also speaks for itself and will need no explanation. When

looking at examples from *Gregor the Overlander*, we will see that no strategy is without a downside and that combinations of strategies are often used.

Aixelá mentions multiple explanations for why certain strategies can or must be used in certain situations. One of these variables is the nature and expectations of the potential readers: when the text is written for a specific audience, the chosen methods can be explained when considering this audience (Aixelá 2010: 204). The fact that we are dealing with a child audience in *Gregor the Overlander* will influence the translation decisions.

## 5.2 CSEs in *Gregor the Overlander*

Many fantasy books will feature CSEs that do not exist in any real world culture: merely in the book's fantasy world. However, this is not the case in *Gregor the Overlander*. Collins creates a world that is very similar to the world as we know it; so similar that there are no unfamiliar CSEs for the reader of the source text. The fantasy is created by impossible things, such as living underground and human sized animals that are small in our world and which can speak in the Underland. However, when translating this book, there are still some CSEs that cause translation problems, due to the difference in the culture of the source and target text. We will discuss two of these problems: the Mississippi method of counting seconds, and the mentioning of certain nursery rhymes.

### 5.2.1 Mississippi

One of the CSEs used in *Gregor the Overlander* is the use of the word "Mississippi" when counting seconds. Gregor uses this technique to count how many seconds it takes to fall when he falls down the air duct into the Underland.

Calmed by the notion that he was asleep, Gregor began to gauge his fall. He didn't own a wristwatch, but anybody could count seconds.

"One Mississippi... two Mississippi... three Mississippi..." At seventy Mississippi he gave up and began to feel panicky again.

(Collins 2003: 16)

The source text reader will immediately understand that Gregor is counting seconds, since American children learn to count seconds by using the word "Mississippi", so they understand the connotation of this word. However, this is not how Dutch children count seconds, so the target text reader will probably not understand why the word "Mississippi" is used here and will be pulled out of his or her reading flow. Let us look at Grit's translation methods to find a suitable strategy for this translation problem.

Some of Grit's methods are not applicable in this situation. A calque would in this situation be the same as preservation, since Dutch people use the same word for the Mississippi river. Although we do know the river by the same name, a calque or preservation will not solve the translation problem: the problem lies within the connotation. The approach strategy is not applicable to this situation either, since Dutch people do not use a certain item to count seconds. The description method is not preferable here, because when the translator would describe the connotation, the reader will be pulled out of his or her reading flow, which is very important in this sentence. More text will make the seconds last longer to pronounce and the idea of counting seconds will be lost.

Preservation is not the preferable method, especially not when translating for children. Some Dutch children of about eleven might know the Mississippi river and

therefore know the denotation, but they are most likely oblivious to the Mississippi counting technique and therefore do not know the connotation. One might argue that since the text explains that Gregor is counting seconds, children will still understand it. However, this counting method will still seem unnatural for them and might pull them out of their reading flow.

A core translation will result in “Mississippi” being translated as “seconden”. This is a possible solution, however, “één seconde, twee seconden, drie seconden” still does not sound natural. It is not the way Dutch children count.

When adapting to how Dutch children learn to count, we will have to lose the “Mississippi”. Simply deleting this word will not be enough: although children do count with “één, twee, drie”, when counting seconds, they need a trick to make sure it takes them a second to get to the next number. In English, the word “Mississippi” is used, while in Dutch, children start counting from the number twenty-one: saying “eenentwintig” takes them about a second. The most natural way for a Dutch child to count seconds is therefore by saying “eenentwintig, tweeëntwintig, drieëntwintig” et cetera. This translation method of adaptation will maintain the idea of counting seconds, without pulling the reader out of the reading flow. In the sentence following Gregor’s quote, however, this counting strategy is not preferable when referring to seventy seconds: Gregor would have counted all the way to ninety, while it has only been seventy seconds. This might cause confusion about the period of time. It is therefore preferable to translate “At seventy Mississippi” as “Na zeventig seconden”. This way, the first few occurrences of “Mississippi” are translated using the adaptation strategy, while the last one is translated with the core translation strategy: a combination of strategies is used.

These strategies cause a cultural neutralisation, but they maintain the function: the reader immediately understands that Gregor is counting seconds. This way, the reader will not be pulled out of his or her reading flow.

### 5.2.2 Nursery rhymes

Another CSE that causes a translation problem is the mention of certain nursery rhymes.

When the people on the quest need to travel for quite a while, Boots starts singing.

She sang her whole repertoire of songs, which included “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”; “Hey, Diddle, Diddle”; “The Itsy-Bitsy Spider”; “The Alphabet Song”; and, of course “Patty-Cake, Patty-Cake”. Having finished, she sang them again. And again. And again. On about the nineteenth round, Gregor decided to teach her “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” just for a little variety.

(Collins 2003: 165-6)

Apart from telling us which songs Boots knows and sings, this excerpt also serves to tell us how annoying this is to Gregor. This is shown in the words “she sang them again. And again. And again”. This repetition is so annoying that Gregor decides to teach her a new song, just to hear something else. Most child readers with young siblings will know how annoying these songs are when hearing them all day. The combination of these song titles and the endless repetition, makes the reader feel sorry for Gregor to have to hear this.

Preservation of these nursery rhyme titles will not cause the same effect for the reader of the target text as the effect it has on the reader of the source text. Although the target text reader will probably not recognise the titles, he or she is probably aware of them being nursery rhymes, since it is a two-year-old girl singing them. However, although it is

mentioned that she often repeats the songs, when the target text reader does not know the songs, it will not trigger the same level of annoyance as it will for the source text reader. This is therefore not a preferable translation method in this situation.

In theory, a calque is a possible translation strategy in this case, however, it results in the same problem we experienced when discussing the preservation technique: when not recognising the songs, the irritation level will not be the same. Translating “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” as “Schitter, schitter, kleine ster” does not have the same effect on the target text reader as it has on the source text reader, so this is not a preferable translation method.

The approach method is applicable for one of the titles. Not every nursery rhyme has an equivalent in other languages. In the case of these six rhymes, only “The Alphabet Song” has a Dutch version: “Het alfabetlied”. One might argue that this is a calque, but since this alfabetlied truly exists instead of it being only a literal translation of the title, it is the Dutch equivalent of The Alphabet Song. This method is only applicable on this one title: the other songs do not have a Dutch equivalent.

A description of the songs would not be a preferable translation method, since the titles occur in a list that would become too long and thereby interrupt the reading flow.

A core translation would result in the translator telling that Boots sang her whole repertoire of songs, which included only five nursery rhymes. In the final sentence of this excerpt, Gregor would decide to teach her another song, just for a little variety. This way, the reader is not distracted by foreign song titles, or lengthy descriptions of what these songs are about, and would therefore not be pulled out of his or her reading flow. However, as was the problem with the preservation and calque, the level of annoyance will not be the

same. Moreover, some of these nursery rhymes recur elsewhere in the story, where the content of the song is referred to, sometimes even with a pun. It would be difficult to use a core translation in these situations: only a real title would make any sense. Since the translator would use a real title in these situations, this title might as well be used in this situation.

When using the adaptation method, we will adapt the English songs of the source text to Dutch songs for the target text. As stated before, some songs reappear in the book, with a reference to their content, so we will have to treat each song title separately.

“Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” does not reappear in the story and there is no reference to the content of the song. It is, however, in my opinion one of the most famous nursery rhymes: it is probably no coincidence that this is the first song Boots thinks of. When thinking of famous Dutch nursery rhymes, “Altijd is Kortjakje ziek” was the first one that came to mind as a translation for “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”, partly due to the fact that they share the same melody. This melody is not important for the translation, but it adds an extra dimension to the translation. The second song, “Hey, Diddle, Diddle”, is mentioned earlier in the story. When Boots looks up at the sky and does not see the moon, she says: “Cow jump moon” (Collins 2003: 47). It is therefore important that the Dutch song also includes a moon. The obvious choice in this case, is “In de maneschijn”. The cow might be lost when translating “cow jump moon” with “in de maneschijn”, but since the cow is not important to the story and the moon is, the function of this title is remained in the translation. The content of “The Itsy-Bitsy Spider” is also crucial: when Gregor and Boots are being held captive by the spiders, Gregor lets her sing this song to see if the spiders would react to it in a positive way. The only widely-known Dutch song about a spider is “De spin Sebastiaan”,



but since in that song the spider gets killed at the end, I cannot imagine Gregor thinking it wise to sing this to the spiders who have them imprisoned. Another option is to translate this song with “Ik zag twee beren” and then let him tell Boots to sing another verse, namely “Ik zag twee spinnen”. This way, it is still a song a two-year-old might know, and there is a reference to a spider when needed. “The Alphabet Song” was already translated into the Dutch equivalent “Het alfabetlied”. “Patty-Cake, Patty-Cake” is also used earlier in the book: Boots plays this clapping game with the cockroaches and they are being honoured by Boots singing “beeg bug” instead of “baby”. This song should therefore be translated with a Dutch clapping game, which gives the opportunity to change the name into the name of the person you are playing with: this could be “Papegaaaitje, leef je nog?”. In this clapping game, Boots might change “papegaaaitje” in “lieve beesie”, for instance. “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” is not important as regards the content. It might, however, contain a slight reference to when Gregor and Boots just arrived in the Underland and they tried to escape by boat. It would therefore be preferable to choose a Dutch song about sailing; when dealing with nursery rhymes, “Berend Botje” would be a desirable translation.

In summary, I would use both the approach and adaptation strategy for these songs:

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star	→	adaptation	→	Altijd is Kortjakje ziek
Hey, Diddle, Diddle	→	adaptation	→	In de maneschijn
The Itsy-Bitsy Spider	→	adaptation	→	Ik zag twee beren
The Alphabet Song	→	approach	→	Het alfabetlied
Patty-Cake, Patty-Cake	→	adaptation	→	Papegaaaitje, leef je nog?
Row, Row, Row Your Boat	→	adaptation	→	Berend Botje

### 5.3 Conclusion

Both the “Mississippi” and the nursery rhymes examples have shown that there is no single way to translate CSEs. Every occurrence of a CSE has to be treated separately. As it turns out, due to the audience’s lack of foreknowledge of the source text culture and language, many CSEs in children’s literature come down to the approach or adaptation method.

## Conclusion

In the first two chapters, we saw that the level of competence and comprehension of the target text reader steers the direction a translator of children's literature has to take. In addition, certain events or characters that influence the storyline or the theme can also determine the translator's path. We looked at how these factors influence translating translation problems in *Gregor the Overlander* on three subjects: non-standard language, speaking names, and culture specific elements.

On the subject of non-standard language, we saw that the language used by the discussed characters is important to their portrayal. It was therefore important to let the Dutch translation of their language create the same effect for the target text reader as the English non-standard language did for the source text reader. It turned out that not every occurrence of non-standard language could be translated in a similar non-standard Dutch utterance, but this was not a problem, as long as overall the same effect is created in the target language. In some situations, it was even possible to add non-standard language to the target text. So, although this non-standard language caused translation problems, they were not insurmountable and it was possible in the translation to portray the characters through their language, just as was done in the source text.

When discussing the translation of speaking names, it was found that the age of the audience is very important when determining which strategy to use. For the target text reader to have the same information about this character through its name as the source text reader, it was in Ripred's case not possible to preserve the name. Dutch children of about the age of ten will not be able to understand the connotation of this English name, simply because they do not speak the language at that age. Boots' situation, however, was different, since Collins already explained her name and an additional explanation would not seem out of place or pull the reader out of his or her reading flow. Since the target text readers would be able to understand the name because of this explanation, I

preferred this non-translation method with additional explanation, since it says closer to the source text.

Regarding the culture specific elements, the age of the target text audience and therefore their lack of knowledge of the source culture, once again led to the translator being forced to not preserve the source culture elements. This time, multiple translation methods were used, since not a single situation was alike. Although the first “Mississippi” occurrence was best translated using the adaptation method, later on, a core translation gave us the preferable solution. While most nursery rhymes were best translated using the adaptation strategy, for one of them, the approach method was preferable. We saw that every occurrence of CSEs should be translated individually, since the different context in which it occurs can result in a different preferable translation strategy.

In conclusion, due to the target audience’s lack of foreknowledge of the language and culture of the source text, translators of children’s literature need to choose explaining or domesticating translation methods more often than not. However, every situation is different and the translator has to look for the preferable translation method in every single situation to make sure the target text has the same effect on the target text audience as the source text has on the source text audience.

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## Appendix

This appendix will feature my translation of parts of *Gregor the Overlander*. These parts are chosen to match the contents of this thesis. The first excerpt will be Gregor's first meeting with the cockroaches and I have chosen this abstract because it features the cockroaches' language discussed in chapter 3.2.1. In addition, this excerpt includes the part where Gregor uses the Mississippi counting technique, which we debated in chapter 5.2.1. The second excerpt speaks of when Gregor and the others meet Ripred, and this excerpt shows Ripred's language as discussed in chapter 3.2.2. The third and fourth excerpt are small pieces of text that mention the nursery rhymes, which were discussed in chapter 5.2.2. The fifth and final excerpt features some additional CSEs, some of Boots' language – which was mentioned in chapter 3.2.3 – and it is a mixture of dialogue and Gregor's thoughts. Naturally, the excerpts will be translated considering the audience of the age of eight and fourteen: the audience for this novel determined in chapter 2.2.



## Excerpt 1

### Hoofdstuk 2

Gregor draaide rond in de lucht, om zijn lichaam zo te houden dat hij niet bovenop Boots zou landen wanneer ze de vloer van de kelder zouden raken, maar er kwam geen klap. Toen herinnerde hij zich dat het washok in de kelder was. Dus waar waren ze nu precies in gevallen?

De rookflarden werden zo dik als dichte mist die zwakjes licht gaf. Gregor kon niet meer dan een meter om zich heen kijken<sup>2</sup>. Zijn vingers graaiden wanhopig door het witte spul, op zoek naar houvast, maar vonden niets. Hij viel met zoveel vaart naar beneden dat zijn kleren bol gingen staan.

“Boots!” schreeuwde hij. Het klonk angstaanjagend hoe het geluid naar hem terugkaatste. “Dit ding moet toch wanden hebben,” dacht hij. Hij riep nog een keer: “Boots!”

Een opgewekt gegiechel klonk op van ergens onder hem. “Ge-go jaaa!” zei Boots.

“Ze denkt dat ze op een grote glijbaan zit of zo,” dacht Gregor. “Ze is tenminste niet bang.” Hij was bang genoeg voor hen beiden. Door wat voor vreemd gat ze ook waren gegleden, het moest een bodem hebben. Dit tollen door de ruimte kon maar op een manier ophouden.

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<sup>2</sup> In eerste instantie had ik in een bijzin nog “in welke richting dan ook” toegevoegd als vertaling van “in any direction”. Dit klonk echter wat geforceerd, dus ik heb besloten om dit bijzinnetje weg te laten, aangezien het element van “any direction” al verwerkt zit in “om zich heen kijken” en er dus qua situatieschets niets verloren gaat.

De tijd verstreek. Gregor wist niet precies hoeveel, maar meer dan logisch was. Er zat toch zeker wel een grens aan hoe diep een gat kon zijn? Op een gegeven moment zou je water, of steen, of aardlagen<sup>3</sup> of zo moeten raken.

Dit was net als in die verschrikkelijke droom die hij soms had. Dan zat hij ergens hoog, ergens waar hij niet mocht zijn, meestal zo iets als op het dak van zijn school. Terwijl hij dan langs de rand liep, zou de vaste grond onder zijn voeten plotseling wegvallen en zou hij naar beneden vallen. Alles zou dan verdwijnen behalve het gevoel van vallen, van dat de grond dichterbij komt, van paniek. Dan, precies op het moment van de klap, zou hij met een schok wakker schrikken, badend in het zweet en met een bonzend hart.

“Een droom! Ik ben in slaap gevallen in het washok en dit is diezelfde gekke droom!” dacht Gregor. “Natuurlijk! Wat kon het anders zijn?”

Gerustgesteld door de gedachte dat hij sliep, begon Gregor zijn val te meten. Hij had geen horloge, maar iedereen kon seconden tellen.

“Eenentwintig... tweeëntwintig... drieëntwintig...” Na zeventig seconden gaf hij het op en begon hij weer in paniek te raken. Zelfs in een droom moest je een keer landen, toch?

Precies op dat moment merkte Gregor dat de mist een beetje begon op te klaren. Hij kon de gladde, donkere wanden van een ronde muur zien. Hij leek door een lange, donkere tunnel te vallen. Hij voelde een opwaartse luchtstroom van onder hem omhoogkomen. De

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<sup>3</sup> “Aardlagen” is niet hetzelfde als “earth’s platelets”, maar hier waren alleen maar ingewikkelde termen voor, zoals “tectonische platen”. Het leek mij heel ongeloofwaardig dat een jongen van elf deze termen zou kennen, dus ik heb gekozen voor een term die hij misschien nog zou kunnen kennen en waar hij aan zou kunnen denken wanneer hij door de aarde valt.

laatste rookflarden trokken weg en Gregor verloor snelheid. Zijn kleren gingen langzaam weer om zijn lichaam hangen.

Onder hem hoorde hij een kleine bons en vervolgens het gedribbel van Boots' sandalen. Een paar tellen later kwamen zijn eigen voeten met vaste grond in aanraking. Hij probeerde erachter te komen waar hij was, maar hij durfde zich niet te bewegen. Hij werd omringd door complete duisternis. Toen zijn ogen gewend raakten, werd hij zich bewust van een zwakke lichtstraal links van hem.

Een vrolijk gilletje<sup>4</sup> kwam erachter vandaan. "Bees! Gote bees!"

Gregor rende op het licht af. Het scheen door een smalle spleet tussen twee gladde muren van steen. Het lukte hem maar net om zichzelf door de opening te wringen. Zijn schoen bleef ergens achter haken, waardoor hij zijn evenwicht verloor. Hij struikelde tussen de stenen muren door en landde op handen en knieën.

Toen hij zijn hoofd ophief, stond recht voor Gregors neus de grootste kakkerlak die hij ooit had gezien.

Nu zaten er in zijn flatgebouw heus wel wat grote insecten. Mevrouw Cormaci beweerde dat een kakkerlak<sup>5</sup> ter grootte van haar hand uit de afvoerpijp van haar badkuip

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<sup>4</sup> Wanneer ik het woord "squeak" met "piep" zou vertalen, zou de Nederlandse lezer veel eerder aan een dier denken dan de Engelse lezer. Wanneer ik het met "gil" zou vertalen, zou de lezer zich teveel zorgen maken. Het woord "gilletje", zeker in combinatie met "vrolijk", zorgt ervoor dat de lezer een vrolijk kind voor zich ziet, in plaats van een kind in gevaar.

<sup>5</sup> Volgens de Van Dale is een "water bug" een "waterwants". Hier kon ik me echter geen voorstelling van maken, dus ik ben verder gaan zoeken. Toen bleek dat "water bug" in de spreektaal vaak gebruikt wordt voor de Amerikaanse kakkerlak ("American"). Dit leek me een logische interpretatie van "water bug", aangezien Gregor de twee kakkerlakken vergelijkt qua grootte. Daarnaast denk ik dat kinderen sneller een voorstelling

was gekropen en daar twijfelde niemand aan. Maar het wezen voor Gregors neus was tenminste anderhalve meter groot. Goed, hij zat dan wel op zijn achterpoten, een heel onnatuurlijke houding voor een kakkerlak, maar toch...

“Gote bees!” riep Boots opnieuw en Gregor slaagde erin om zijn mond dicht te doen. Hij ging terug op zijn knieën zitten, maar hij moest alsnog zijn hoofd achterover doen om de kakkerlak te zien, die<sup>6</sup> een soort fakkel vasthield. Boots holde naar Gregor en trok aan de kraag van zijn shirt. “Gooote bees!” hield ze vol.

“Ja, ik zie het, Boots. Groot beest!” zei Gregor zachtjes, terwijl hij zijn armen stevig om haar heen sloeg.

“Heel... groot... beest.”

Hij deed hard zijn best om te herinneren wat kakkerlakken aten. Vuilnis, rot fruit... mensen? Hij dacht niet dat ze mensen aten. De kleintjes niet, in elk geval. Misschien wilden ze wel mensen eten, maar werden ze altijd doodgetrapt voor die tijd. Hoe dan ook, dit was niet het juiste moment om erachter te komen.

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kunnen maken van een kakkerlak dan van een waterwants. Daarom leek “kakkerlak” mij hier de wenselijke vertaling.

<sup>6</sup> Ik heb hier voor bijzin gekozen, zodat ik het verwijzwoord “die” kon gebruiken. Als ik hier “hij” had gebruikt – het juiste verwijzwoord voor kakkerlak – had het verwarring op kunnen leveren voor de lezer, aangezien het woord “hij” de vorige twee keer nog naar Gregor verwees. Het leek me ook niet goed om “hij” door “de kakkerlak” te vervangen, aangezien er dan twee keer vlak achter elkaar “de kakkerlak” zou staan. Daarom leek deze bijzin met “die” mij een wenselijke oplossing.

In een poging nonchalant over te komen, sloop Gregor voorzichtig terug naar de spleet in de muur. “Goed, meneer de Kakkerlak, wij gaan maar weer eens, we zullen niet langer staren – ik bedoel, storen, bedoel ik –”<sup>7</sup>

“Ruikt wat hier zo lekker, ruikt wat?” siste een stem en het duurde een hele minuut voordat Gregor zich realiseerde dat die stem van de kakkerlak was. Hij was te verbijsterd om de vreemde woorden ook maar een beetje te snappen.

“Uh... pardon?” wist hij uit te brengen.

“Ruikt wat hier zo lekker, ruikt wat” siste de stem opnieuw, maar de toon was niet dreigend. Alleen nieuwsgierig en misschien een tikkeltje opgewonden. “Zijn klein mens, zijn?”

“Oké, goed, ik praat tegen een levensgrote kakkerlak,” dacht Gregor. “Rustig blijven, lief zijn, geef het insect antwoord. Hij wil weten ‘Ruikt wat zo lekker, ruikt wat?’ Zeg dat maar gewoon.” Gregor dwong zichzelf om eens flink te snuiven en kreeg daar toen spijt van. Er was maar een ding dat zo rook.

“Ikke poep!” zei Boots op precies het juiste moment. “Ikke poep, Ge-go!”

“Mijn zusje moet een schone luiertje,” zei Gregor, die er een beetje verlegen van werd.

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<sup>7</sup> De woordgrap met “bug” en “to bug” was niet met iets soortgelijks te vertalen. Dus toen ging ik associëren met woorden die met insecten te maken hebben: eng, vies, poten. Uiteindelijk ben ik maar gaan associëren met het woord “lastigvallen” en kwam ik zo op “storen”. Aangezien Gregor zo onder de indruk is van dit enorme beest, kan ik me goed voorstellen dat hij hem zit aan te staren. En daarnaast leren veel kinderen van hun ouders dat het onbeleefd is om te staren, dus dat is een verspreking die Gregor niet snel wil maken, waardoor hij zichzelf snel corrigeert.

De kakkerlak, als hij het goed aan zijn gezicht kon aflezen, leek onder de indruk.

“Ahhh. Komen dichterbij mogen wij, komen dichterbij?” zei de kakkerlak, die subtiel met een poot de grond voor zich veegde.

“Wij?” zei Gregor. Toen zag hij de andere vormen uit de duisternis om hen heen tevoorschijn komen. De gladde, zwarte hobbels die hij voor stenen had aangezien waren bleken de ruggen te zijn van nog een stuk of tien<sup>8</sup> enorme kakkerlakken. Ze gingen enthousiast om Boots heen staan, terwijl ze hun voelsprietten in de lucht zwaaiden en trilden van vreugde.

Boots, die dol was op complimentjes, wist instinctief dat ze bewonderd werd. Ze strekte haar mollige armpjes<sup>9</sup> naar de levensgrote insecten uit. “Ikke poep,” zei ze deftig en ze gaven een sis van waardering.

“Ben zij prinses. Overlander, ben zij?” “Ben zij koningin, ben zij?” vroeg de leider, die onderdanig zijn hoofd boog.

“Boots? Een koningin?” vroeg Gregor. Hij moest ineens lachen.

De kakkerlakken werden bang van het geluid<sup>10</sup> en ze trokken zich stijfjes terug.

“Lachen waarom, Bovenlander, lachen waarom?” siste eentje en Gregor realiseerde zich dat hij hen had beledigd.

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<sup>8</sup> In het Nederlands wordt “tien” sneller als maat voor schatting gebruikt dan “twaalf”. Wanneer er geen letterlijk aantal wordt bedoeld, is het dus natuurlijker om met “tien” te vertalen.

<sup>9</sup> Ik vond “mollige armen” net klinken alsof ze eigenlijk dikker was dan ze zou moeten zijn, terwijl “chubby” voor mij eerder de associatie van babyvet oproept in deze context. Door hier een verkleinwoord te gebruiken, blijft die kinderlijke associatie behouden.

“Omdat we, zeg maar, arm zijn en ze er nu niet uitziet en... noemde u<sup>11</sup> mij een Bovenlander?” sloot hij zijn verhaal zwak af.

“Zijn u niet Bovenlander mens, zijn u? Niet Onderlander u,” zei de fakkeldragende kakkerlak, die hem aandachtig aan zat te staren. “U ziet uit als, maar ruikt niet als.”

De leider leek zich iets te beseffen. “Rat slecht.” Hij draaide zich om naar zijn vrienden. “Wij laten Bovenlanders hier, wij laten?” De kakkerlakken dromden samen om te overleggen en begonnen allemaal tegelijk te praten.

Gregor ving flarden van hun gesprek op, maar hij snapte er niks van. Ze gingen zo op in hun discussie dat hij weer over een ontsnappingspoging ging nadenken. Hij keek om zich heen. In het zwakke licht van de fakkel zag het ernaar uit dat ze in een lange, lage tunnel waren. “We moeten terug naar boven,” dacht Gregor. “Niet naar opzij.” Hij kon nooit langs de wanden klimmen van het gat waar ze uitkwamen als hij Boots vasthield.

De kakkerlakken namen een beslissing. “Jullie komen, Bovenlanders. Naar mensen brengen,” zei de leider.

“Mensen?” zei Gregor opgelucht. “Zijn er andere mensen hier beneden?”

“Rijden u, rijden u? Rennen u, rennen u?” vroeg de kakkerlak en Gregor begreep dat hij hem een lift aanbood. Hij leek niet stevig genoeg om hem te dragen, maar hij wist dat sommige insecten, zoals mieren, vele malen hun eigen gewicht konden dragen. Hij werd

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<sup>10</sup> Het is in het Nederlands minder gebruikelijk om levenloze onderwerpen in de zin te hebben. Door de kakkerlakken het onderwerp te maken, klinkt de zin natuurlijker in het Nederlands.

<sup>11</sup> Gregor vindt de kakkerlak intimiderend en probeert hem gunstig te stemmen. Daarnaast heeft hij hem eerder al aangesproken met “Mr. Roach”, dat ik vertaald heb met “meneer de Kakkerlak”, dus het lijkt me logisch dat hij de kakkerlak met “u” aanspreekt.

misselijk toen hij voor zich zag hoe hij de kakkerlak zou verpletteren als hij erop probeerde te zitten.

“Ik denk dat ik maar ga lopen – ik bedoel, rennen,” zei Gregor.

“Rijden de prinses, rijden zij?” zei de kakkerlak hoopvol, terwijl hij vleierend met zijn voelsprietten zwaaide en voor Boots op zijn buik ging liggen. Gregor had nee willen zeggen, maar de kleuter klom direct op de rug van de kakkerlak. Hij had het kunnen weten. Ze zat altijd graag op de grote metalen schildpadden als ze naar de dierentuin<sup>12</sup> gingen.

“Goed, maar ze moet mijn hand vasthouden,” zei Gregor en Boots pakte gehoorzaam zijn vinger beet.

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<sup>12</sup> Voor dit cultuurspecifieke element heb ik gekozen voor de methode van de kernvertaling (zie hoofdstuk 5.1 bij de uitleg van de “core translation method”. Ik verwachtte niet dat veel kinderen de Central Park Zoo zouden kennen en het was ook niet belangrijk voor de context. Ik kon op internet geen afbeelding vinden van de “giant metal turtles”, dus erg beroemd zijn ze ook niet. Het hoeft dus niet per se een specifieke dierentuin te zijn. De verwijzing naar zoiets als “grote metalen schildpadden” verwijst wel naar een specifieke dierentuin, maar door te zeggen “als ze naar de dierentuin gingen” impliceer ik dat ze geregeld naar dezelfde dierentuin gaan.



## Excerpt 2

### Hoofdstuk 19

“Blijf jullie staan!” riep Vikus, toen Luxa, Henry en Mareth opsprongen met het zwaard in de hand. “Blijf jullie staan!”

De rat bekeek de drie gewapende mensen geamuseerd. “Ja, blijf jullie staan of ik zal gedwongen worden te bewegen en daar raak ik altijd slecht gehumeurd van,” zei hij loom.

Luxa en Mareth stopten aarzelend, maar Henry negeerde Vikus’ bevel en stormde op de rat af. Zonder een andere spier te bewegen, tikte de rat met zijn staart. Hij klapte als een zweep toen hij het zwaard uit Henry’s hand sloeg. De kling tolde over de stenen vloer en sloeg met een klap in de grotwand. Henry greep vanwege de pijn zijn pols beet.

“De moeilijkste les om te leren voor een soldaat is om bevelen op te volgen waar hij het niet mee eens is,” zei de rat filosofisch. “Pas op, jongen, of je zult net zo eindigen als ik, zonder enige respectabele positie en je schrale hachje warmend<sup>13</sup> aan het vuur van je vijanden.” De rat knikte naar de oude man. “Vikus.”

“Ruigrood,” zei Vikus met een glimlach. “We zijn zojuist aan ons diner<sup>14</sup> begonnen. Eet je mee?”

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<sup>13</sup> Over het algemeen probeer ik in kinderliteratuur te voorkomen om de Engelse –ing-vorm te vertalen met een voltooid deelwoord, aangezien het snel archaisch klinkt, maar in dit geval past het goed bij het ingewikkelde taalgebruik van Ripred dat besproken is in hoofdstuk 3.2.2.

<sup>14</sup> Vikus lijkt hier in de brontekst het dure taalgebruik van Ripred over te nemen, door het woord “commence” te gebruiken, in plaats van zoiets als “beginnen”. Door hier “diner” in plaats van “eten” te gebruiken in de doeltekst, heb ik geprobeerd hetzelfde effect te creëren.

“Ik dacht dat je het nooit zou vragen,” zei Ruigrood, die zichzelf zachtjes<sup>15</sup> afzette tegen de grotwand en naar het vuur sjokte. Hij ging op zijn hurken naast Solovet zitten. “Mijn beste Solovet, wat aardig van je om aan te komen vliegen om me te ontmoeten. En dat terwijl er nog wel een oorlog gaande is.”

“Ik laat zelden de gelegenheid schieten om de maaltijd met jou te gebruiken, Ruigrood,” zei Solovet.

“Ach, kom nou, je weet heel goed dat je alleen bent meegekomen om informatie bij me af te vleien,” zei Ruigrood. “En om je te verkneukelen in je overwinning bij de Vlammen.”

“Ik heb jullie vernietigd,” zei Solovet opgewekt. “Jouw leger rende hard weg, jankend de rivier in.”

“Leger,” snoof Ruigrood. “Als dat een leger was, ben ik een vlinder. Ik had meer kans gemaakt als ik met kruiers had gevochten.” De rat keek naar Temp en Tick, die in elkaar gedoken tegen de wand zaten en hij zuchtte. “Met uitzondering van de aanwezigen, uiteraard.”

Boots fronste haar wenkbrauwen en waggelde naar Ruigrood. Ze wees naar hem met haar mollige vingertje. “Jij muis?”

“Ja, ik ben een muis. Piep, piep. Nou kst weer terug naar je kleine insectenvriendjes,” zei Ruigrood, terwijl hij een stuk gedroogd vlees oppakte. Hij scheurde een stuk met zijn

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<sup>15</sup> Voor deze handeling gebruiken we in het Nederlands sneller “afzetten” dan “duwen”, maar aangezien dit woord ook kan aanduiden dat iemand vaart probeert te maken en dat hier niet het geval is, heb ik het woord “zachtjes” toegevoegd.

tanden af en zag dat Boots er nog stond<sup>16</sup>. Hij trok zijn lippen terug om een rij scherpe tanden te laten zien en een hard sissend geluid naar haar te maken.

“O!” zei Boots, terwijl ze zich naar haar kakkerlakken haastte. “O!”

“Niet doen,” zei Gregor. De rat keek hem aan met opgluoiende ogen en Gregor schrok van wat hij daar zag. De intelligentie, het dodelijke en, nog het meest verrassend, de pijn. Deze rat was niet zoals Vlijmbek en Kaalkop<sup>17</sup>. Hij was veel ingewikkelder en veel gevaarlijker. Gregor voelde zich voor het eerst in het Onderland totaal kansloos. Als hij tegen deze rat vocht, zou hij geen enkele kans maken. Hij zou verliezen. Hij zou dood zijn.

“Ah, dit is vast onze krijger,” zei Ruigrood zachtjes. “Wat lijkt jij veel op je papa.”

“Laat mijn zusje niet zo schrikken,” zei Gregor, die probeerde zijn stem niet te laten trillen. “Ze is nog maar een klein kind<sup>18</sup>.”

“Ik hoorde dat ze meer lef heeft dan jullie allemaal bij elkaar,” zei Ruigrood.

“Uiteraard telt moed pas als je kan tellen. Ik veronderstel dat jullie verder allemaal kunnen tellen en dat jullie moed elk ogenblik zijn hoogtepunt kan bereiken.”

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<sup>16</sup> In de brontekst staat dat ze zich nog niet had verplaatst, of nog niet had bewogen, maar ik vond dat in het Nederlands onnatuurlijk klinken. Vanuit het andere perspectief daarentegen – dat ze er nog stond – vond ik wel natuurlijk klinken. Dus daarom heb ik het vertaald met “zag dat Boots er nog stond”.

<sup>17</sup> Omdat ik “Ripred” vertaald heb in “Ruigrood”, vond ik dat ik ook de andere ratten een Nederlandse naam moesten hebben, zeker omdat de namen bepaalde associaties oproepen die de lezer laten weten wat voor karakter deze beesten hebben. “Fangor” moest een enge naam zijn die iets met enge tanden te maken had, dus het “Vlijm” komt van “vlijmscherp” en de “bek” is vanwege de bek waar die vlijmscherpe tanden zich bevinden. Ik heb voor “Kaalkop” gekozen, omdat “Shed” het idee geeft dat het beest in de rui is.

<sup>18</sup> Volgens de Van Dale wordt het woord “baby” in het Engels ook gebruikt voor kinderen die Nederlanders al kleuter noemen. In het Nederlands wordt het woord “baby” volgens de Van Dale gebruikt voor kinderen tot één jaar. Om verwarring over Boots’ leeftijd te voorkomen voor de Nederlandse lezer, heb ik ervoor gekozen om het Engelse “baby” met “klein kind” te vertalen.

De rat wierp een vluchtige blik naar Luxa, Mareth en Henry, die op afstand bleven. De vleermuizen spreidden hun vleugels en trokken ze weer in, omdat ze niet goed wisten wat ze moesten. “Nou, kom op dan, heeft er verder niemand honger? Ik haat het om in mijn eentje te eten. Dan voel ik me zo ongeliefd.”

“Ik heb hen niet voorbereid, Ruigrood,” zei Vikus.

“Dat blijkt,” zei de rat. “Blijkbaar is mijn komst een onverwacht genoeg.” Hij stortte zich op zijn soepbeen<sup>19</sup>, waarbij hij een verschrikkelijk krassend geluid maakte.

“Ik stel jullie voor aan Ruigrood de knager,” zei Vikus tegen de groep. “Hij zal zich bij de zoektocht voegen als jullie gids.”

Er klonk een kort geluid dat klonk als een soort ademhaling, aangezien de helft van de aanwezigen verschrikt naar adem hapte. Er volgde een lange stilte waarin niemand uitademde. Gregor probeerde te begrijpen wat Vikus zo kalmpjes vertelde. Een rat. Hij liet hen achter in de handen van een rat. Gregor wilde ertegenin gaan, maar zijn keel was bevroren.

Uiteindelijk sprak Luxa vrijuit met een stem die kraste van haat. “Nee, dat zal hij niet. Wij reizen niet met ratten.”

“Het is vereist volgens ‘de Profetie van Gray’, Luxa,” zei Solovet. “Eén knager erbij.”

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<sup>19</sup> “Soepbeen” is misschien een woord dat niet veel elfjarigen kennen, maar het andere woord ervoor is “mergpijp” en ik was bang dat kinderen dan aan een “mergpijpje” zouden denken en dat zou toch andere associaties oproepen. Dat zou niet bij Ripreds karakter passen.

“‘Erbij’ kan van alles betekenen,” snauwde Henry. “Misschien laten we de knager er wel dood bij liggen.”

“Misschien. Maar nu ik getuige ben geweest van jullie laatste aanval, heb ik mijn twijfels,” zei Ruigrood, die een stukje kaas begon te eten.

“We hebben sinds het middaguur vijf ratten gedood,” zei Luxa.

“Bedoel je de idioten die ik zorgvuldig heb uitgekozen vanwege hun lafheid en dwaasheid? O, ja, bravo, Uwe Hoogheid. Dat was een meesterlijk staaltje vechtkunst,” zei Ruigrood met een stem waar het sarcasme vanaf droop. “Vlei jezelf niet met de gedachte dat je met een rat hebt gevochten.”

“Zij hebben zelf Vlijmbek en Kaalkop vermoord,” zei Mareth dapper.

“Nou, dan neem ik mijn woorden terug. Vlijmbek en Kaalkop waren uitstekende vechtersbazen, in het uitzonderlijke geval dat ze nuchter waren,” zei Ruigrood. “Ik verwacht echter dat ze in de minderheid waren en enigszins van hun stuk gebracht door de komst van onze krijger. Wat zeg jij ervan, Krijger? Weiger jij ook met mij mee te gaan?”

Gregor keek recht in Ruigroods spottende, gepijnigde blik. Hij wilde weigeren, maar als hij dat deed, zou hij dan ooit zijn vader kunnen vinden?

Alsof hij zijn gedachten las, nam Vikus het woord: “Je hebt Ruigrood nodig om je naar je vader te leiden. Deze tunnels zijn niet in kaart gebracht door mensen. Je zou nooit de weg kunnen vinden zonder hem.”

Maar toch, hij was een rat. Gregor was nog maar een paar dagen in het Onderland en hij verachtte de ratten nu al. Ze hadden Luxa’s en Henry’s ouders vermoord, zijn vader

gevangengenomen en hem en Boots bijna opgegeten. Hij voelde een soort kracht door hem heen razen als hij eraan dacht hoeveel hij ze haatte. Maar als alle ratten slecht waren, wie was dan dit vreemde wezen dat hem vanaf de andere kant van het vuur aanstaarde en aanbood om hun gids te zijn?

“En waarom zou jij dat voor ons doen?” zei Gregor tegen Ruigrood.

“Een terechte vraag,” zei Ruigrood. “Nou, Krijger, ik ben van plan om koning Gorgor van zijn troon te stoten en jij moet me daarbij helpen.”

“Hoe dan?” zei Gregor.

“Dat weet ik niet,” gaf Ruigrood toe. “Dat weet niemand.”

Gregor stond op en pakte Vikus bij zijn arm. “Ik moet u even onder vier ogen spreken,” zei hij. De boosheid in zijn stem verraste zelfs hemzelf. Nou, hij *was* ook<sup>20</sup> boos! Hij had niet ingestemd met de rat. Hier had hij niet voor getekend.

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<sup>20</sup> In het Nederlands wordt er veel gebruik gemaakt van partikels. In dit geval loopt de zin er soepeler door dan wanneer ik “ook” had weggelaten en bovendien klinkt het hierdoor nog meer alsof Gregor geïrriteerd is. Hij voelt zich in de steek gelaten en bedrogen en deze irritatie geeft dat goed weer.

### Excerpt 3

Terwijl Gregor achter hem aan liep, deed Boots haar hoofd achterover en keek ze van links naar rechts. “Wat zoek je<sup>21</sup>, Boots?”

“Maan?” zei Boots. Normaal gesproken kon je de sterren vanuit hun huis niet zien, maar de maan was wel zichtbaar tijdens heldere nachten. “Maan?”

Gregor keek omhoog naar de pikzwarte hemel en realiseerde zich toen dat er natuurlijk geen hemel was. Ze zaten in een soort gigantische ondergrondse grot. “Geen maan, meisje. Geen maan deze keer<sup>22</sup>,” zei hij.

“In de manesijn<sup>23</sup>,” zei ze droog<sup>24</sup>.

“Mm-hm,” stemde Gregor in. Als kakkerlakken praatten en vleermuizen aan balsport deden, dan was het ook niet gek dat er geen maneschijn was<sup>25</sup>. Hij zuchtte toen hij het kapotgelezen boek met kinderversjes voor zich zag dat thuis in de kist bij Boots’ bedje lag.

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<sup>21</sup> Wanneer iemand zoekend rondkijkt, wordt in het Nederlands sneller de vraag gesteld “Wat zoek je?” dan “Wat ben je kwijt?” Aangezien de strekking van deze twee vragen op hetzelfde neerkomt en het effect dus hetzelfde blijft, kies ik het liefst voor de vraag die het natuurlijkst klinkt in het Nederlands.

<sup>22</sup> Bij het vertalen van “tonight” zijn er twee keuzes: “vanavond” of “vannacht”. In dit geval is deze keus echter bijzonder moeilijk, want het is avond noch nacht: het feit dat ze in een soort grot zitten, maakt dat het donker is. Dus wanneer ik voor “vannacht” of “vanavond” zou kiezen als vertaling, zou ik een foute interpretatie maken voor de Nederlandse lezer. Daarom ging ik dit liever uit de weg en heb ik het vertaald met “deze keer”.

<sup>23</sup> Zie hoofdstuk 5.2.2 voor de vertaling van de titels van de kinderversjes. Daarnaast valt de /g/ onder de klanken die veel Nederlandse kinderen op tweejarige leeftijd niet kunnen uitspreken, dus vandaar “manesijn” in plaats van “maneschijn” (Jansma and Harpman 1997: 45).

<sup>24</sup> Als het een ander karakter betrof, zou ik “matter-of-factly” het liefst met “nuchter” of “zakelijk” vertaald hebben, maar deze manieren van spreken leken mij niet passend voor een tweejarig kind. Het woord “droog” kwam vervolgens qua betekenis nog het dichtst in de buurt.

<sup>25</sup> Aangezien de “cow jump moon” verwijzing weg viel in mijn vertaling, moest ik deze zin veranderen. Het gekke element is hier geworden dat er geen maan is en om het toch aan te laten sluiten bij wat Boots zei – en het is van belang dat het daarbij aansluit, want dat is wat Gregor aan het denken zet – heb ik er “geen maneschijn” van gemaakt in plaats van “geen maan”.

## Excerpt 4

De vleermuizen stegen op. Boots was dolblij met haar nieuwe reisgenoten. Ze zong haar hele repertoire aan liedjes, dat onder andere uit “Altijd is kortjakje ziek”; “In de maneschijn”; “Ik zag twee beren”; “Het alfabetlied”; en natuurlijk “Papegaaitje, leef je nog?” bestond. Toen ze klaar was, zong ze ze nog een keer. En nog een keer. En nog een keer. Na ongeveer de negentiende keer besloot Gregor haar “Berend Botje” te leren voor de afwisseling. Boots kon al snel meezingen en probeerde het vervolgens de kakkerlakken aan te leren. Zij<sup>26</sup> leek hun valse stemmen niet erg te vinden, maar Gregor voelde de spieren in Ares’ nek elk couplet stijver worden.

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<sup>26</sup> In deze situatie heb ik voor “zij” gekozen in plaats van “ze”, aangezien “zij” meer nadruk geeft. In deze zin in sprake van een tegenstelling, maar die vond ik in de brontekst niet goed naar voren komen. Aan het eind van de zin merkte ik pas waar hij heenging en moest hem daardoor twee keer lezen. Om dat voor de Nederlandse lezer te voorkomen, heb ik voor het aandachttrekkende “zij” gekozen, zodat de lezer al een tegenstelling met een ander karakter kan verwachten en daardoor minder verrast is door het einde van de zin.



## Excerpt 5

### Hoofdstuk 12

“Sla alarm!” riep<sup>27</sup> Vikus en in de hele stad was ineens een drukte van jewelste. Er werd op hoorns geblazen, mensen haasten zich naar binnen en naar buiten, vleermuizen doken naar beneden voor bevelen en verdwenen weer zonder de tijd te nemen om te landen.

Iedereen negeerde Gregor terwijl ze zich klaarmaakten voor de alarmfase. Hij wilde aan Vikus vragen wat er aan de hand was, maar de oude man stond in de Hoge Hal in een waas van vleermuisvleugels bevelen uit te delen.

Gregor ging op het balkon staan en kon Regalia zien wriemelen als een zwerm bijen. Er kwamen veel ratten aan. De Onderlanders maakten zich op voor de verdediging. Plotseling realiseerde hij zich dat er een oorlog gaande was.

Gregor werd duizelig van de angstaanjagende gedachte – en de hoogte van het balkon. Terwijl hij terug naar binnen strompelde, pakte een sterke hand zijn arm beet. “Gregor de Bovenlander, maak jezelf klaar, want we gaan zo vertrekken,” zei Vikus.

“Waarheen? Waar gaan we heen?” vroeg Gregor.

“We gaan je vader bevrijden,” zei Vikus.

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<sup>27</sup> Ik heb lang getwijfeld tussen de werkwoorden “schreeuwen” en “roepen”, maar ik vond uiteindelijk dat “schreeuwen” ook een paniekerige kant had, waarvan hier geen sprake is. Daarom heb ik voor “roepen” gekozen.

“Nu? Kunnen we weg nu de ratten aanvallen?” zei Gregor. “Ik bedoel, dit is het begin van een oorlog, toch?”

“Niet zomaar een oorlog. Wij zijn van mening dat het de oorlog is die wordt voorspeld in ‘de Profetie van Gray’. De oorlog die kan leiden tot de totale vernietiging van onze mensen,” zei Vikus. “De zoektocht naar je vader vervolgen is onze beste kans om hem te overleven,” zei Vikus.

“Ik mag Boots meenemen, toch?” vroeg Gregor. “Ik bedoel, ik neem haar mee,” corrigeerde hij zichzelf.

“Ja, Boots zal meekomen,” zei Vikus.

“Wat moet ik doen? U zei dat ik me moest klaarmaken,” vroeg Gregor.

Vikus dacht even na en riep Mareth. “Breng hem naar het museum, laat hem kiezen wat hij denkt nodig te hebben tijdens de reis. Ah, hier is de delegatie uit Troje<sup>28</sup>!” zei Vikus. Hij stapte in een nieuwe wervelwind van vleugels.

Gregor rende achter Mareth aan, die naar de deur was gesprint. Drie trappen en een aantal hallen later kwamen ze aan in een grote kamer afgeladen<sup>29</sup> planken.

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<sup>28</sup> Ik heb “Troy” behandeld als een cultuurspecifiek element en heb de leenvertaling gebruikt als vertaling. Het gaat hier om een verzonnen stad, maar aangezien de namen van mensen en steden in het Onderland allemaal uit het Latijn en Grieks komen, is dit duidelijk een verwijzing naar de oud-Griekse stad Troje. De stad wordt herkenbaarder voor de Nederlandse lezer wanneer hij op de Nederlandse manier wordt weergegeven, dus een leenvertaling is wenselijk om hetzelfde effect in de doeltekst te creëren als in de brontekst.

<sup>29</sup> Veel synoniemen van “afgeladen” bevatten het woord “vol” en aangezien dat een paar woorden eerder ook al in de zin staat, vond ik dat dit woord hier beter in de zin pastte.

“Hier zijn de dingen die uit het Bovenland zijn gevallen. Onthoud dat wat je kiest je moet dragen,” liet Mareth hem weten, terwijl hij een leren tas met een trekkoord in zijn handen duwde.

De planken waren gevuld met alles van honkballen tot autobanden. Gregor wilde dat hij de tijd had om alles beter te bekijken; sommige dingen moesten wel honderden jaren oud zijn. Maar tijd was een luxe die hij niet had. Hij probeerde zijn aandacht erbij te houden.

Wat kon hij meenemen dat hem zou helpen tijdens de reis? Wat had hij het hardst nodig in het Onderland? Licht!

Hij vond een werkende zaklamp en verzamelde batterijen uit elk elektrisch ding dat hij kon vinden.

Er was iets anders dat zijn aandacht trok. Het was zo'n helm die bouwvakkers droegen. Er zat een lampje in de voorkant ingebouwd, zodat ze iets konden zien in de pikzwarte tunnels onder New York<sup>30</sup>. Hij pakte de helm en duwde hem op zijn hoofd.

“We moeten gaan!” beval Mareth. “We moeten je zusje halen en wegvliegen!”

Gregor draaide zich om om hem te volgen en toen zag hij het. Cola<sup>31</sup>! Een daadwerkelijk, ongeopend, slechts een klein beetje ingedeukt blikje cola. Het zag er aardig

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<sup>30</sup> “New York City” is de Amerikaanse manier om deze stad aan te duiden, vooral om het onderscheid te maken tussen de stad en de staat New York. De meeste Nederlanders, zeker jonge kinderen, zijn niet zo goed bekend met alle Amerikaanse staten en zullen dus niet aan de staat denken wanneer ze “New York” horen, maar alleen maar aan de stad. Die stad staat onder Nederlanders ook gewoon bekend als “New York”, dus het overnemen van het woord “City” of iets als “Stad” komt alleen maar vreemd over voor de Nederlandse lezer. Vandaar dat ik dit woord heb weggelaten.

<sup>31</sup> “Root beer” is onder de jonge Nederlandse lezers waarschijnlijk niet zo bekend als drankje. Dat hoeft niet altijd een reden te zijn om iets te vertalen in plaats van te behouden, maar in dit geval wel. Gregor gebruikt dit

nieuw uit. Hij wist dat het een buitensporigheid was, dat hij alleen het hoognodige mee zou moeten nemen, maar hij moest het hebben. Het was zijn favoriete drankje en bovendien deed het hem aan thuis denken. Hij stopte het blikje in zijn tas.

De kinderkamer was dichtbij. Gregor rende naar binnen en zag Boots vrolijk met drie Onderland peuters een theekransje houden. Heel even bedacht hij zich bijna om haar daar toch achter te laten. Zou ze niet veiliger zijn hier in het paleis? Maar toen herinnerde hij zich dat het paleis zo meteen belegerd zou worden door ratten. Gregor kon haar daar niet alleen achterlaten. Wat er ook gebeurde, ze zouden bij elkaar blijven.

Dulcet hielp Gregor snel om een rugzak om te doen en liet Boots erin glijden. Ze maakte een klein pakketje aan de onderkant van de rugzak vast. "Opvangdoeken," zei ze. "Een paar speeltjes en wat lekkers."

"Bedankt," zei Gregor, die blij was dat er iemand aan de praktische kant van reizen met Boots had gedacht.

"Moge jij wel varen, lieve Boots," zei Dulcet. Ze gaf het kind een kus op haar wang.

"Doe-doei, Dul-cee," zei Boots. "Tot saks!"

Zo namen ze altijd afscheid bij Gregor thuis. Geen zorgen. Ik kom zo terug. Tot straks.

"Ja, tot straks," zei Dulcet, maar de tranen sprongen haar in de ogen.

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blikje namelijk later in het boek in een ontsnappingspoging door hem hard te schudden en open te maken. Dus de lezer moet weten dat er veel koolzuur inzit en dat je het daarmee als een soort wapen kan gebruiken. Als de Nederlandse lezer niet van deze eigenschap van dit drankje weet, wordt dus niet hetzelfde effect gecreëerd voor de doeltekstlezer als voor de brontekstlezer. Daarom kies ik liever voor het bekendere "cola".

“Doe voorzichtig, Dulcet,” zei Gregor, terwijl hij haar onbeholpen een hand gaf.

“Moge jij hoog vliegen, Gregor de Bovenlander,” zei ze.

In de Hoge Hal stond de afvaardiging klaar voor vertrek. Verscheidene vleermuizen waren geland en werden bepak met voorraad.

Gregor zag dat Henry met een knuffel afscheid nam van een pijnlijk dun tienermeisje. Ze kon maar niet stoppen met huilen ondanks zijn pogingen om haar te troosten.

“De dromen, broer,” snikte ze, “ze zijn erger geworden. Er staat je een verschrikkelijk onheil te wachten.”

“Wees niet bang, Nerissa, ik ben niet van plan om dood te gaan,” zei Henry geruststellend.

“De dood is niet het grootste onheil dat er is,” zei zijn zus. “Moge jij hoog vliegen, Henry. Moge jij hoog vliegen.” Ze omhelsden elkaar en Henry sprong op zijn fluweelzwarte vleermuis.

Gregor keek gespannen toe toen het meisje zijn kant op kwam. Hij wist nooit goed wat hij moest zeggen als mensen huilden. Maar ze had zichzelf weer onder controle tegen de tijd dat ze bij hem aankwam. Ze hield een opgerold papiertje naar hem uitgestrekt. “Voor jou, Bovenlander,” zei ze. “Moge jij hoog vliegen.” En nog voor hij iets terug kon zeggen was ze al weggelopen om steun te zoeken tegen de muur.

Hij opende het papiertje, dat geen papier was maar een soort gedroogde dierenhuid, en zag dat er zorgvuldig “de Profetie van Gray” op geschreven stond. “Dat is echt raar,” dacht Gregor. Hij had gewild dat hij hem nog een keer kon lezen om er meer van te

begrijpen. Hij was van plan geweest om het aan Vikus te vragen, maar hij was het in alle haast vergeten. “Hoe wist ze dat ik dit wilde hebben?” mompelde hij tegen Boots.

“Nerissa weet veel dingen. Ze heeft de gave,” zei een jongen die op een gouden vleermuis naast hem klom. Toen hij nog een keer keek, realiseerde Gregor zich dat het Luxa was, maar haar haar was gemillimeterd.

“Wat is er met je haar gebeurd?” vroeg Gregor, terwijl hij de profetie in zijn zak propte.

“Lange lokken zijn gevaarlijk in de strijd,” zei Luxa onverschillig.

“Jammer, ik bedoel – het ziet er kort ook mooi uit,” zei Gregor snel.

Luxa barstte in lachen uit. “Gregor de Bovenlander, denk jij dat mijn schoonheid van enig belang is in zulke tijden?”

Gregors gezicht gloeide van schaamte. “Dat bedoelde ik niet.”

Luxa schudde alleen maar haar hoofd naar Henry, die haar een grijns teruggaf. “De Bovenlander spreekt de waarheid, nicht, je ziet eruit als een geschoren schaap.”

“Des te beter,” zei Luxa. “Want wie zou er nu een schaap aanvallen?”

“Beh,” zei Boots. “Beeeh.” En Henry lachte zo hard dat hij bijna van zijn vleermuis viel. “Saap doet beh,” zei Boots zichzelf verdedigend, waardoor hij alleen maar opnieuw in de lach schoot.

Gregor lachte ook bijna. Hij had heel even het gevoel alsof hij onder vrienden was. Maar deze mensen hadden nog een lange weg te gaan voordat hij hen als vrienden zou

beschouwen. Om zijn fout te verbergen, concentreerde hij zich op het vinden van een comfortabele manier om zijn leren tas te dragen waarbij hij zijn handen vrij zou houden. Hij bond hem aan een schouderband van de rugzak.

Toen hij opkeek, zag hij dat Luxa hem nieuwsgierig aankeek. “Wat draag je op je hoofd, Bovenlander?” vroeg ze.

“Het is een bouwvakkershelm. Met een lampje,” zei Gregor. Hij deed hem aan en uit om het haar te laten zien. Hij zag aan haar dat ze het dolgraag wilde uitproberen, maar dat ze het niet wilde vragen. Gregor woog snel zijn opties in zijn hoofd af. Goed, ze waren dan wel geen vrienden... maar het was wel zo handig als hij met haar overweg kon. Hij had haar nodig om bij zijn vader te komen. Gregor bood haar de helm aan. “Hier, kijk maar.”

Luxa probeerde nonchalant over te komen, maar haar vingers bedienden enthousiast het lichtknopje. “Hoe houd je het licht erin zonder lucht? Wordt het niet heet op je hoofd?” vroeg ze.

“Hij werkt op een batterij. Het is elektriciteit. En er zit een plastic laagje tussen het licht en je hoofd. Je mag hem wel opdoen als je wilt,” zei Gregor.

Zonder te aarzelen zette Luxa de helm op haar hoofd. “Vikus heeft me weleens verteld over elektriciteit,” zei ze. Ze liet de lichtstraal door de kamer schijnen voor ze hem met tegenzin aan Gregor teruggaf. “Hier, je moet je brandstof sparen.”

“Je bent een trendsetter,” zei Henry vrolijk. Hij haalde een van de kleine stenen fakkels van de muur en legde die bovenop zijn hoofd. “Wat vind je ervan, Luxa?” vroeg hij, terwijl hij zich met overdreven arrogantie van de zijkant<sup>32</sup> liet bewonderen<sup>33</sup>.

“Je haar staat in brand!” riep<sup>34</sup> ze, terwijl ze plotseling naar adem snakte en naar hem wees. Henry liet de fakkel vallen en sloeg op zijn hoofd, terwijl Luxa begon te schaterlachen.

Toen hij zich realiseerde dat het een grap was, nam Henry haar in een houdgreep en wreef hij met zijn knokkels door haar korte haar, terwijl zij de slappe lach had. Zo leken ze heel even net een stel kinderen uit het Bovenland. Gewoon een broer en zus, net als Gregor en Lizzie, die met elkaar stoeiden.

Vikus liep met grote passen door de hal. “Jullie twee zijn in een vrolijke bui, voor het feit dat er een oorlog gaande is,” zei hij met gefronste wenkbrauwen, terwijl hij op zijn vleermuis sprong.

“Het is slechts een overmaat aan energie, Vikus,” zei Henry, toen hij Luxa losliet.

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<sup>32</sup> Ik was bang dat het woord “profiel” bij hedendaagse kinderen andere associaties oproept hebben dan bij kinderen ruim tien jaar geleden, vanwege de opkomende sociale media. Daarom heb ik ervoor gekozen om “profile” met “zijkant” te vertalen.

<sup>33</sup> Ik vond “terwijl hij haar zijn zijkant liet zien” vreemd klinken, dus ik wilde op zoek naar een ander werkwoord. Ik heb uiteindelijk voor “laten bewonderen” gekozen, omdat dit nog extra arrogantie uitdrukt en dit dus precies past bij de houding die hij aanneemt.

<sup>34</sup> In het Engelse “gasped” zit zowel het snakken naar adem als het spreken, maar ik vond het in het Nederlands onnatuurlijk klinken om “snakte ze naar adem” te zeggen wanneer het ook het spreken moet aanduiden. Daarom heb ik het snakken naar adem in een bijzin erachteraan gezet. Toen moest ik vervolgens nog wel een werkwoord vinden om het spreken aan te duiden, maar “zei ze” vond ik te slap, aangezien ze wel doet alsof ze schrikt. Daarom heb ik voor het werkwoord “roepen” gekozen.



“Bewaar die energie – die zullen jullie nodig hebben daar waar we naartoe gaan.

Rijdt<sup>35</sup> jij met mij, Gregor,” zei Vikus, die een hand uitstreekte. Gregor sprong achter hem op zijn grote grijze vleermuis.

Boots schopte vol verwachting in zijn zij. “Ikke ook rije. Ikke ook,” piepte ze.

“Opstappen<sup>36</sup>!” riep Vikus, en Henry en Luxa sprongen op hun vleermuizen. Gregor kon zien dat Solovet en Mareth zich ook klaarmaakten voor vertrek. Mareth zat op een vleermuis die hij nog nooit had gezien. Waarschijnlijk was zijn andere vleermuis nog steeds aan het herstellen.

“Opstijgen!” beval Solovet, en de vijf vleermuizen gingen in een V-formatie de lucht in.

Toen ze steeds hoger de lucht in gingen, had Gregor het gevoel dat hij zou ontploffen van opwinding en geluk. Ze gingen naar zijn vader! Ze zouden hem gaan redden en mee naar huis nemen en zijn moeder zou lachen, weer echt lachen, en de feestdagen zouden weer gezellig zijn, niet verdrietig, en muziek, en – en hij liep op de zaken vooruit. Hij hield zich absoluut niet aan zijn afspraak en hij zou er zo mee stoppen, maar voor nu zou hij zijn gang gaan en zoveel fantaseren als hij wilde.

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<sup>35</sup> De dt-vorm van het werkwoord voorafgaand aan “jij” is grammaticaal incorrect, maar aangezien het hier om een verwisseling van de eerste twee woorden gaat, heb ik ervoor gekozen om deze werkwoordsvorm te behouden. Zo wordt duidelijk dat de eerste twee woorden omgedraaid zijn, aangezien de dt-vorm wel correct zou zijn wanneer het achter jij zou staan.

<sup>36</sup> In eerste instantie had ik hier “opstijgen”, maar toen ik die een paar zinnen verderop ook wilde gebruiken, heb ik hier voor “opstappen” gekozen, om ervoor te zorgen dat het twee verschillende termen waren.

Toen ze in een schuine bocht over de stad Regalia vlogen, ervoer Gregor opnieuw de ernst van hun taak door de chaotische drukte beneden. De poorten van het stadion werden versterkt door enorme stenen platen. Karren met voedsel versperden de wegen. Mensen die kinderen en spullen droegen, haastten zich naar het paleis. Overal werden extra fakkels aangestoken, zodat de stad haast leek te baden in zonlicht.

“Is het niet beter als het donker is als er een aanval gaat komen?” vroeg Gregor.

“Nee, maar voor de ratten wel. Wij hebben onze ogen nodig om te vechten, zij niet,” zei Vikus. “De meeste wezens in het Onderland, de kruiers, de vleermuizen, de vissen, zij hebben geen licht nodig. Wij mensen kunnen niet zonder.”

Gregor sloeg die informatie in zijn achterhoofd op. De zaklamp was toch het beste voorwerp om mee te nemen.