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Jaap Robben & Benjamin Leroy

The Sourballs

Original title: *De zuurtjes*

CHILDREN'S NOVEL

A funny, sweet-and-sour, richly illustrated children's book about two brothers, Harry and Herbert Sourball. They don't laugh. They dread anything and everything. Their favourite pastime? Whining!

'Poet Jaap Robben and illustrator Benjamin Leroy, two young colts that complete a flawless course, frolicsome and frisky but at the same time refreshingly mature.'

– *Jury report, Golden Owl Children's Literature Prize 2009 for LET'S START A FOREST*

About the authors

Jaap Robben (1984) initially enrolled in Environmental Studies before moving on to the performing arts. He refers to himself as a ‘cabaret performer’ and performs his poetry on a regular basis. Robben authors columns and stories. His work has appeared in quality Dutch newspapers, including *NRC Handelsblad* and *Trouw*, and he is a frequent guest on various radio programmes. In 2008, he was appointed poet laureate of the city of Nijmegen in The Netherlands.

Together with Benjamin Leroy he published *LET’S START A FOREST* (2008), a book of children’s poems that was nominated for the Golden Owl Children’s Literature Prize 2009. Other books by his hand are *TWO FLIES* (2004) and *THE NIGHT CRICKETS* (2007).

Benjamin Leroy (1980) graduated in 2003. Ever since, he has been active as an illustrator, publishing a series of books, magazines, posters, etc. Hallmarks of his work are emotion, humour, and an eye for the absurd. Benjamin’s drawings and collages are multi-layered. There is always something new to discover. A magical detail, a life-size rabbit, minuscule treasures in hidden corners.

His technique is accomplished but eclectic. He uses anything he finds on his drawing table. Tinted paper, biro, coloured pencil, acrylic, adhesive tape, newspaper print, etc. Often, coincidence is the rule. A smudge, a picture turned upside down, discoloured paper ... everything serves as a source of inspiration for an amazing landscape, a dream scene, or a flabbergasted football team.



About the book

Go on. Stand in front of the mirror. Look at your face.

Lick on a lemon. Do you see any changes?

Now, take a big bite out of the lemon. And another one.

Think of grapefruit, sour cream, or fingernails on blackboard. Soup made of toilet blocks.

The way your face looks now, that’s exactly what brothers Harry and Herbert Sourball look like. All the time. And that’s how they like it!

Hurry up. Take a lump of sugar. Read what happens when one day, Harry and Herbert receive a little something in the mail that turns their easy-peasy life upside down.

They live in a terraced house in an ordinary street, those Sourballs. They complain all the time. About everything. Nobody wants to live next-door to them. Inside, it's spectacularly dreary. Even the flowers on the wallpaper hang their heads. The Sourballs want no truck with anybody, ever. No noisy or nosy neighbours, no chats on the pavement, no 'come in, do you fancy a cuppa?' They prefer it this way. Just as they go for second-mouth false teeth because they're *free*. Have the brothers always been this bitter? What has happened to turn them into surly, money-grubbing misers?

Jaap Robben & Benjamin Leroy, *De zuurtjes*
ISBN 978 90 445 1671 5
Hardcover, 160 pages, 220 x 180 mm, full color
Publication: August 2010

Bibliography

Twee vliegen (TWO FLIES) (2004, poetry)
De nacht krekelt (NIGHT CRICKETS) (2007, poetry)
Zullen we een bos beginnen? (LET'S START A FOREST), (2008, children's poetry)
De Zuurtjes (THE SOURBALLS), (2010, Children's book)

Foreign rights

Protea Boekhuis – South Africa

Prizes and awards

2009 – nomination for the Golden Owl Children's Literature Prize 2009

Awards Jaap Robben

2001 Trouw Columnist Award
2002 NRC Final Exams Story Award
2003 Write Now Incentive Award Passionate
2004 DUB Poetry Festival People's Choice Award
2009 shortlist Golden Owl Children's Literature Prize

The press about LET'S START A FOREST:

'Poet Jaap Robben and illustrator Benjamin Leroy, two young colts who completed the course friskily and playfully, but also flawlessly and surprisingly maturely.' – *Jury report: Golden Owl Children's and Youth Literature Prize 2009*

'In my opinion, this exquisite anthology opens another window on this chaotic world, and children could well discover a love of life in poetry after reading it.' – *Frank Groothof*

`With his invitingly light-footed tone and surprisingly simple language, his poems testify to a heartfelt wonderment at the childhood spirit.' – *De Groene Amsterdammer*

`Jaap Robben poses stimulating questions that are simultaneously both childishly down to earth and philosophical. (...) they set one thinking.' – *de Volkskrant*

`In this collection resounds a voice to keep listening out for.' – *Trouw*

`Jaap Robben manages to find exactly the right tone. His poems are entertaining, sometimes a little philosophical and always irresistible. They rise up out of the everyday and soar dreamily above it. Fantastic and familiar at the same time. The answer to Jaap Robben's question is: Yes, we would like to plant a forest with you, with trees that reach up to the sky.' – *PZC*

`Poet Jaap Robben focuses on little things, empathises with them and brings them to life. He is wonderfully in touch with the children's world. (...) Leroy's naïve drawings leap out of the page.' – *Esta*

`Everything in wonderfully clear language. (...) Leroy's work is too amusing to keep secret.' – *Woest en ledig*

`A future children's classic.' – *Dagblad van het Noorden*

`When you close the last page, you are left with a lovely glow. Jaap Robben will give both children and adults a lot of pleasure.' – *Dagblad van het Noorden*

The press about THE SOURBALLS:

`Above all things, THE SOURBALLS is funny and cleverly subtextual.' – *NRC Handelsblad*

`The book entices you to read, and look, more times than one.' – *De Standaard*

`Young writing talent Jaap Robben (1984) goes all out in evocative language to depict the brothers, who will undoubtedly set many children off in fits of laughter. (...) The contribution of Flemish illustrator Benjamin Leroy (...) is vital to this book. His drawings – dashing pencil strokes, crosshatching, water colours, and collages – sometimes take over the entire story.' – *Trouw*

`A delightful book. (...) Robben knows how to throw a quirky party.' – *BN DeStem*

`Jam-full with jokes, THE SOURBALLS tumbles along at an agreeable pace. Unobtrusively, Robben weaves his tale and he has a sophisticated sense of the absurd. Using pencils and scissors, Leroy reveals himself to be a shrewd illustrator (...). With this beautifully crafted book they again do both kids and adults a good turn. (...) Four stars.' – *Dagblad van het Noorden*

‘The story is refreshing, as are the illustrations that tell parts of the tale under their own steam.’ – *Nederlands Dagblad*

Excerpt

Trudy

From that day, they see a lot of Trudy. Sometimes she only cycles past with a brief wave of her hand because she is in a hurry. But more and more often, she rings the bell.

Suddenly she is at the door carrying a small pot of soup in a plastic bag. 'For your mum', she says. 'I've made too much. So I thought, I'll just take some along. It's enough for three small bowls.'

Trudy does not just bring things. She even comes into the house. At first, she tends to ask politely where the toilet is, and would the Sourballs happen to have a vase for the flowers? Then, slowly, she starts to find her way around the house. She opens the proper kitchen cabinet for the teacups. And sometimes she stirs a pan of soup on the stove, as though she is their mother.

Almost unnoticed, she brings in new objects every time she visits.

One day she even presents them with a tree for the back garden. Harry and Herbert don't have a clue what to do with it. As soon as Trudy is gone, they saw off the roots and put the trunk between the paving stones in the garden. Just like that.

The mood in Celery Road 33 is changing. As if the heating is gradually turned up, little by little.

What is strange is that the Sourballs do everything Trudy suggests.

The changes are like an ugly woollen itchy jumper that your granny knitted specially for you. You only put it on because Mum says you have to.

Until Trudy wants to take a bowl of soup up to Agatha. The Sourballs don't realise what she is up to until she stands in front of the bedroom door.

Just before she knocks, Harry and Herbert steal underneath her arms. They block the door. The Sourballs scramble to muster up words. 'Don't ... you shouldn't. She is, errrrr, ill. Seriously ill. It's catching!'

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