

The Sower is a poetic optimist

DREAM BIG, START SMALL

Joost Baars is a teacher and an optimist. The statue of The Sower on campus inspired him to write the poem that accompanies this story. He explains why.

Photo Guy Ackermans

Joost Baars is a poet with several volumes of verse to his name. But that is the Leiden literary scholar Joost Baars. Wageningen's Joost Baars teaches plant breeding. But he too occasionally puts a creative pen to paper. After a tough long-distance run, for example, or, in the case of his poem about The Sower, during a performance by Syrian musicians in Impuls. But no, he has no ambitions to become an established poet. 'Though I am looking for my voice. Writing is a nice way of expressing your thoughts. If you do it well, you reach a lot of people.'

Does that voice have something to say?

'Yes, I think so. I am a seeker and a thinker. I'm not aiming to become another Joost Baars the poet, but my whole life I've felt the need to express myself. And I'm trying to find the right form for that. Trying is learning, says my five-year-old daughter. That's what

I'm doing here. I have an open mind and I ask questions. And I'm very optimistic. That's where this poem comes from.'

Aren't the other WUR folks around you open-minded?

'There are a lot of experts working at WUR who know so much about their subject that they have developed a closed mind. They know exactly how things are and they are so convinced they are right that they don't ask any big questions anymore. The heavy work pressure doesn't leave room for doubts, exploration and posing philosophical questions. That distances them from the people who are just starting out. I am keen to be a beginner, someone who asks questions. And I wish our students the same.'

Does our education system suppress that kind of open mind in students?

'I don't see much discussion in our education. Someone tells a story but no



Text Roelof Kleis

questions are asked. The personality type I see a lot in WUR only speaks if they are sure about what they're saying. Whereas I want to ask questions, to dare to entertain doubts and to change my mind if my opinion turns out to be wrong. I form my opinion by expressing it and assessing the responses I get. That's not what our students here in Plant Sciences are taught. We learn to conduct a debate and to identify the counterarguments but not to engage in real dialogue, in which you learn to see each other's points of view. If we stand opposite each other, your 6 is my 9. Yet we're looking at the same thing.'

The Sower in the poem – is that you, actually?

'Yes, of course it's about me. It came to me when I was thinking about who I am, what I do, and how I look at education. I am someone who likes to sow. I have lots of ideas, which I send up like trial balloons. Quite often, you don't get the

'I HAVE LOTS OF IDEAS, WHICH I SEND UP LIKE TRIAL BALLOONS'



The Sower

The sower is optimistic
The land prepared
The soil worked
Nutrition added
The time has come to sow
The seeds have been picked

The sower is optimistic
Lets go of the seeds
Scatters them openhandedly
Accepts the results as they come
Trusts the work that has been done
The sower hopes

The sower is optimistic
About the weather
About the sun
About the rain
About the resilience of the crop
About the plasticity of plant

The sower is optimistic
The seeds will germinate
The plants will grow
Weeds the unwanted
The yield will come
Without hope no food

The sower is optimistic
Has hope
Trusts
Accepts
Feast or famine
The sower lets go

The sower is optimistic

