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## *My Dear Double* by Abdellatif Laâbi

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**Cover Page Footnote**

Abdellatif Laâbi, *Mon cher double*. Paris: Clepsydre/Éditions de la difference, 2007. 9-28

Allan Johnston and Guillemette Johnston  
*My Dear Double (Part 1)*

Abdellatif Laâbi  
*Mon cher double*

My double  
an old acquaintance  
whom I visit with moderation  
He is a shameless one  
who plays on my timidity  
and knows how to take advantage  
of my distractions  
He is the shadow  
that follows or precedes me  
aping my gait  
He sneaks into my dreams  
and fluently speaks  
the language of my demons  
Despite our great intimacy  
he remains a stranger to me  
I neither hate nor love him  
for after all  
he is my double  
the proof by default  
of my existence

Sometimes  
I find him sitting in my place  
and don't dare ask him  
to get up  
I recognize him by the particular odor  
of my finger joints  
when I am not well  
His carnal inconsistency  
troubles me  
and I'm a little jealous of it

Since there is only one seat  
in my bedroom  
I stay standing  
I imagine that he works for me  
in his own way  
He paints on the light  
to show me  
how I should go about it  
with words  
and if I decide to open my mouth  
he suddenly disappears

When I look at the sea  
ignoring the waves  
he turns his back to me  
—in a manner of speaking—  
It seems like he is listening  
to the sound of a secret clock  
marking off the part  
of time allotted to death  
When I raise my eyes  
from the sea  
to the swelling peak  
he persists in seeing nothing  
but the abyss  
He spoils my fun  
with his pretensions  
to lucidity

As soon  
as I discover a country  
he surveys another one  
and sends me derogatory messages  
What amazes me  
leaves him stone cold

The language I introduce myself to  
does not have the caliber  
of the one he sputters  
The national dish  
I'm about to savor  
without preconception  
always lacks the spice  
or the creaminess he adores  
and in the beauty  
that bowls me over in passing  
he inevitably seeks and finds  
the hidden defect  
That's why for some time  
I have limited  
my voyages

He whispers to me  
that he's holding back  
the word I have  
on the tip of my tongue  
for my own good  
If I have become a real master  
of hindsight  
to whom do I owe it  
If I walk with purpose  
who decides?  
Ah I strongly doubt  
my solitude  
when I talk to myself  
It may be  
that it's only when I kiss  
that I completely feel  
myself

At the turn of a phrase  
of a strophe  
I stumble upon words  
it would never cross my mind  
to use  
on hackneyed images  
reminiscences of the stone age  
of thought  
I get alarmed  
The artisan I am  
suspects some talent  
for snake-like deceit  
I'm not ready to swallow  
I thus deal  
with a forewarned bird-catcher  
a cultivated censor  
a fine craftsman of doublespeak  
"Know thyself," the wise one asserted  
Certainly  
but things being what they are  
I would like to add:  
Beware of that self

He claims to be Argentinian  
while I have a hard time  
considering myself French  
You would die more Moroccan than he is  
while I revel  
in my savage freedom  
of statelessness  
He argues  
in favor of cremation  
and me I am far  
from having solved  
the riddle of where

to be buried  
He tries to enroll  
in tango classes  
without respect  
for my fully screwed up  
spinal column  
To say the least  
he exhausts me

Take risks  
Make an effort?  
It's not his cup of tea  
For me it's the roller coaster  
the pass of Thermopylae  
Charybdis and Scylla  
the Augean stables  
the torment of Tantalus  
the throes  
of the Iraqi quagmire  
the Gaza powder-keg  
and the voyages Sinbad  
has not dared to tell  
I am the overflow  
of his fears  
the factotum  
of his grand ideas  
And the worst  
is that I put up with it  
without flinching

I would have liked  
at my venerable age  
to quietly cultivate my garden  
caress the leaves of my bamboo  
and polish them one by one

play the bee to my roses  
and gather my fill of nectar  
bury my arms in the earth  
and patiently wait until they grow back  
as two magnolias  
and thus stretch out my branches  
to collect the dew of the firmament  
shelter the migratory birds  
or children  
who would have read and appreciated

*The Baron in the Trees*

No  
it's no good  
when I hear the snickering  
of the one who persists  
in planting around me  
a hedge  
of deforming mirrors

One day  
inspired by Abraham's story  
on official assignment  
I get ready to slit the intruder's throat  
hoping  
it goes without saying  
for divine intervention  
in the form of a ram  
or lacking that  
a turkey  
Seeing nothing coming  
and getting desperate  
I resolve  
to turn the weapon on myself  
What weapon?  
I only see between my fingers



an ordinary Bic pen  
and am enraged to discover  
it has dried up

I also sometimes happen to reason  
to myself saying:  
Let us accept this division of tasks  
One lookout is not enough  
there should be two, ten, a thousand  
And then  
what is the external voice  
without the inner one  
weighing carefully  
each thing and its opposite  
listening to  
the most distant memory  
the labyrinth's familiar  
guiding us thus  
toward accuracy of expression  
and comprehensive vision  
placing on our tongue  
oh so rarely  
the melting seed of reconciliation  
with ourselves

Without warning  
he disappears for a long time  
to the point that I start  
to doubt  
his existence  
Like a troubled soul  
I feel less useful  
than an onion skin  
Aridity overcomes me  
My inner voice

is only a gurgle  
and my being  
is reduced to a gut  
So

I spread myself on my bed  
and close my eyes  
cursing poets  
and poetry

Is he the despot  
or is it me  
The empire we are fighting over  
is it worth it  
Does it truly exist  
or is it only a mirage  
formed by the vapors of drunkenness  
and the chilled steam  
of compassion  
Is it a haven  
Or a trap door?  
Poor him  
poor me  
who play hopscotch  
with the bigger kids  
pretending to forget  
that the guardians of prosperity  
also shoot at the old  
even if they still  
have children's eyes

Have I invented him  
for the sake of the cause?  
I assure you no  
I can still distinguish  
a white thread

from a black thread  
the breathing of stone  
from the hot breath of living spirit  
I am rarely wrong  
about the origin of fragrances  
the density of air  
the nature of prints  
left in the sand  
on the skin  
or the retina  
Don't worry  
I have not yet crossed  
the fine line

There are blessed days  
when I take a break from him  
Whether or not he is there  
I manage to expel him  
from my protective bubble  
What happiness!  
My pains  
give me a respite  
the leech of questions  
releases its pressure  
the Grim Reaper  
passes by  
without shooting me down with a look  
the infinite becomes habitable  
and the house of the soul  
vast enough to welcome the procession  
of my helpless visitors  
Master of my own time  
I no longer run after harmony  
I feel that I was there before her

But he or she  
returns  
Affirming this  
May I dare ask  
Is he, is she really  
the same  
What do I know about it?  
I try in vain to detect the essence  
of these multiple manifestations  
and content myself with capturing  
the subliminal and moreover  
often trivial message:  
Stop smoking  
Do something about your OCD  
Be careful not to spill on yourself  
when you eat  
Stop watching TV  
Decide to buy  
the complete works of Paganini  
Don't look for a black cat  
in a dark room  
especially if the cat doesn't exist

With him  
I lose my sense of humor  
which it seems  
makes my friends glad  
To lambast stupidity  
his stupidity as well  
and all the hellish days  
is only given  
to an elect few  
However  
and herein lies my pride  
I think that my candidacy

has not been usurped  
I discovered this propensity  
at a late time  
and deplore to see it reduced  
to the suitable share  
because of the shadow of a possible  
fantasy that crossed my mind  
So what is to be done?  
as Comrade Lenin said

Cultivate my uniqueness?  
That's not my style  
Consult?  
Out of the question  
Hunt down my lookalikes  
ensnare them like a slave merchant  
and lock them in a cargo hold?  
No  
I don't have that aggressiveness  
Write little poems  
about flowers and butterflies  
or other very white and plump poems  
that glorify the vanity of language?  
That doesn't do much for me  
when the horns of the bull  
gore my hands  
and the beast's breath  
is burning my face  
I might as well shout out to my double  
while shaking the *muleta* in front of him:  
*Toro*  
come here and get it!

## Commentary

The theme of the double is as old as literature itself—witness the relationship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. More recent fictive examples include Joseph Conrad’s “Secret Sharer” and Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. But the interactions with the double illuminated in Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi’s “My Dear Double” complicate any simple arrangement of lawgiver vs. outlaw, man vs. beast, or good vs. evil. In fact the description of the double as “dear” illuminates this ambiguous relationship. Laâbi’s double is a figure defined in part by the (perhaps clichéd) cultural concepts of multiculturalism or postcolonialism, and his writing also bears the mark of the problematic concept of Francophone literature in addition to his coming to terms with his personal political history and the ever-soliciting presence of the endless remaking and remapping of history through ancient and contemporary political turmoils.

Laâbi explored his relation to *francophonie* in a comment describing speakers/writers of a language different from their native or birth language in a 2001 interview. Answering the question “Francophone is ... a political term. What about other terms that get used to further reduce and define Francophone poets as either being ‘inspired’ or ‘politically engaged?’” Laâbi said,

The question ... has to do with all the writers who do not write in their mother-, or, as I prefer to call it, birth-language. Take Indo-Pakistani writers—for example, Salman Rushdie, Ondaatje, etc. In England, the writers who are currently moving literature forward are not necessarily native to England—they are people who come from outside. In France we have the example of Kundera, who decided to write in French. This is a huge phenomenon in the world today. Apart from literature that we’d call “national,” there is a new kind of literature which is currently emerging in what I would call the peripheries of the world—India, Africa, or elsewhere. What is interesting here is that these literatures are straddling between two cultures, two imaginations, and two differ-

ent languages. But these writers are not only “between”—they have mastered both sides. I am perfectly bi-lingual: my birth-language is Arabic, my writing language is French. Perhaps what makes what I write unique is that the two cultures are intertwined. Even when I am writing in French, my Arabic language is there. There is a musicality in Arabic, and these words enter into my French texts. I think that people are not seeing the originality of this phenomenon which is currently world wide.<sup>1</sup>

This sense of doubling is amplified as an overall concern in Mohammed Belmaïzi’s study “Introduction à la poétique d’Abdellatif Laâbi”:

Laâbi has forged a twofold textual type of writing, where orality has a preponderant role. In Laâbi’s work, the written French, for which the Latin alphabet is used, is molded through orality. That means that each French word, said out loud, is going to create another word that provides the sonorous image of the Arabic language. Thus, there are two overlapping texts: a written one and an oral one; whatever is said in French will be heard in Arabic. It is the projection of orality onto graphical symbols and vice versa that either makes for confronted or reconciled meanings. As a result, this strategy concerns not only the words, but ends up mixing and doubling the text at all levels: characters, places, and situations, to the extent where it becomes legitimate to consider Laâbi’s poetry and fiction as fantastic literature.<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis on orality led us to work on retaining Laâbi’s discursive, speaking voice in our translation. For the most part “My Dear Double” eschews punctuation, indicating transitions

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Abdellatif Laâbi by Kristin Prevallet, Paris, May 2001. Edited and transcribed by Omar Berrada. Translated by Kristin Prevallet and Omar Berrada. <http://doublechange.com/issue3/laabi.htm>. Accessed 19 May 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Abstract, “Introduction à la poétique d’Abdellatif Laâbi” by Mohammed Belmaïzi. Project MUSE. [muse.jhu.edu/article/643572](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/643572). Full article available in *Expressions maghrébines*, vol. 15, No. 2 (hiver 2015), DOI: 10.1353/exp.2016.0020. Accessed 19 May 2018.

between thoughts through capitalization and stanza breaks. We keep this feature to reflect the apparently casual style Laâbi brings to his work. This conversational tone, which lets one imagine (for instance) sitting with Laâbi in a coffee house talking about someone else, best serves the sense of orality that emerges in the work, as for instance when we first hear about the double:

Despite our great intimacy  
he remains a stranger to me  
I neither hate nor love him  
for after all  
he is my double  
the proof by default  
of my existence

Laâbi's *il me reste étranger*, "he remains a stranger to me," could be read "he is unknown to me" or "he remains foreign," echoing in the latter the theme of cultural distance and/or duality implied in the concept of *francophonie*. Yet Laâbi's own assertion of the intimate relationship he senses between Arabic and French led us, while still retaining the unavoidable universal and political flavor that is traced through history and then through literature, to move beyond a polarized, politicized reading to one addressing the psycho-spiritual complications he experiences with his double. The idea is one of uprootedness and confusion, of not knowing exactly where one belongs. Studying the interventions of his double, Laâbi recognizes the power of this inner presence that participates in the progression of the text borne out of a melting-pot of cultures, a presence that manifests itself in the pluralistic, ever-changing mosaic stemming from the psyche that surreptitiously weaves the text to which it surrenders.

A constant contrast recurs between a simpler world and a more intellectualized, critical one, conveyed for example in the "showing/telling" contrast Laâbi brings up in describing the act of writing:

He [the double] paints on the light  
to show me



how I should go about it  
with words  
and if I decide to open my mouth  
he suddenly disappears

The ambiguity in *Il peint sur la lumière*, “He paints on the light,” lies on one hand in the possibility that the double is representing light, the way an Impressionist might by creating form and shadow in a painting, to show how to achieve an artistic effect that Laâbi then tries to capture in words (which when articulated orally—“if I decide to open my mouth,” *si je m’avise d’ouvrir la bouche*—fail him: “suddenly he disappears,” *aussitôt il disparaît*). But another reading might introduce darkness, concealment, diversion, or deflection, perhaps censorship, as the light is painted over. In either way the quality of doubling points back to a characterization Laâbi makes of his background, suggesting the dual cultural influences informing his work:

I was born in a country that was colonised by the French. In school we did not learn Arabic because we were taught in French. So when I began to write, the only language that I really knew was French.... I was born into an illiterate environment. My parents were never able to express themselves. One of the reasons I started to write was for the men and women who are not able to express themselves, but who are not stupid nonetheless ... to allow them to speak, to have something to say.<sup>3</sup>

Capturing that duality of experience, that sense of an oral Arabic culture within a literate Francophone one that is then translated into English, suggests the issues surrounding—and hopefully somewhat overcome—in rendering Laâbi’s report on his interactions with this mysterious and elusive double that puts between him and his writing *une haie / de miroirs déformants*, “a hedge / of deforming [or distorting, or deflecting] mirrors,” in a process of inversion, multiplication, and crossings over of altered cultures and meanings presented in kaleidoscopic style.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Abdellatif Laâbi by Kristin Prevallet.

## About this translation

Given that Archipelago Press has just released *In Praise of Defeat*, an extensive bi-lingual volume of Laâbi's works translated into English by Donald Nicholson-Smith<sup>4</sup> that includes this poem, one could ask why another translation should be necessary. A good answer, other than the one that different translations reveal different aspects of the writer's work and different impacts of that work on the literary imagination, is that Nicholson-Smith's translation drops eight of the eighteen stanzas in Laâbi's original poem as published in the volume *Mon cher double*, though it does include a few stanzas from later portions of the book. It should be noted that Laâbi himself decided on these cuts; as Nicholson-Smith noted in a email concerning another translation we published in *Transference 7*, "*In Praise of Defeat* is a selection by the author from his own work."<sup>5</sup> Yet we feel that reading the poem without these omissions illuminates aspects of the work that do not come across in Nicholson-Smith's translation. For instance, stanzas 5 and 6 (not included in Nicholson-Smith's translation) address the double's interference in the use of language or perhaps even in the creative process, while stanza 8 (also not included) takes us on a rollicking ride through mythology and politics in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> As an example, note the following passage:

For me it's the roller coaster  
the pass of Thermopylae  
Charybdis and Scylla  
the Augean stables  
the torment of Tantalus

<sup>4</sup> Donald Nicholson-Smith, tr. *In Praise of Defeat: Poems by Abdellatif Laâbi* (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2016). The section of "My Dear Double" we have translated appears on pp. 624–643.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Nicholson-Smith, email correspondence with Guillemette and Allan Johnston, 31 December 2019.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the stanzas are not numbered, so our characterization of the stanzas by number is based solely on our counting of them. Similarly, Nicholson-Smith's translation does not number stanzas, and since eight out of the eighteen stanzas of the poem are cut in Nicholson-Smith's translation, any reference to these stanzas by number may differ from our enumeration of them.

the throes  
of the Iraqi quagmire  
the Gaza powder-keg

While ostensibly contrasting Laâbi's political involvement with his double's passivity or "coolness," the passage takes us from the famous Greek battle into Homer's *Odyssey*, the labors of Heracles, and Tantalus's condemnation in Tartarus before moving on to the contemporary nightmare of Middle-Eastern conflicts. The topsy-turvy roller coaster ride is introduced by an untranslatable pun: Laâbi's term for "roller coaster" is *montagnes russes*, literally "Russian mountains," possibly making oblique reference to the Caucasus Mountains, and so alluding to Prometheus's fate for rebelling against Zeus by giving humans fire, i.e., intelligence, and perhaps even life. Whether or not this is the case, the passage involves an electrifying spin through classical mythology directly into contemporary events.

The note on *montagnes russes* above suggests some of the difficulties involved in translating Laâbi's work. Literal translation can be problematic when working with idiomatic French expressions such as this one that cannot be translated directly into English, and the situation may be further complicated if the French idiom's syntax has been remolded and fused to reflect the sounds and structures of oral Arabic. After all, Laâbi claims that "Even when [he is] writing in French, [the] Arabic language is there. There is a musicality in Arabic, and these words enter [the] French text." An example of this might be the following:

*L'artisan que je suis  
soupçonne quelque industrie  
des couleuvres  
que je ne suis pas prêt à avaler  
J'ai donc affaire  
à un oiseleur averti  
un censeur cultivé  
un fin tailleur de langue de bois*

The artisan I am  
suspects some talent

for snake-like deceit  
I'm not ready to swallow  
I thus deal  
with a forewarned bird-catcher  
a cultivated censor  
a fine craftsman of doublespeak

The French have an idiom, *faire avaler des couleuvres à quelqu'un*—literally, “to make someone swallow garter snakes”—which means to feed someone false information or fibs, generally to tease, mislead, or humiliate that person.<sup>7</sup> Laâbi employs this idiom in a way that splits its components and isolates images (*des couleuvres*) while superimposing other images that bring an oral or conversational quality on the passage, illuminating the potential naivety of the recipient as well as the sophisticated craft that inspires Laâbi to write under the bewitching influence of his double. The double here seems to be construed in some ways as Laâbi's source of inspiration, yet we get a sense that this source operates with a deliberate agenda. This last impression gets enhanced by the description of the double as a *oiseleur averti* (“forewarned bird-catcher”), *censeur cultivé* (“cultivated censor”), and *fin tailleur de langue de bois* (“fine craftsman of doublespeak”). Laâbi's double here appears to serve as muse while actually directing the process of writing, possibly toward some kind of distortion or censorship. This and other passages demonstrates the way in which Laâbi's text is paved with colorful and suggestive images that explore idioms, shape lines, and reflect the oral rhythms that emerge via this conflicted creative process.

Many of Laâbi's idioms require unpacking, and all demand consideration of relation to overall meaning and effect. In the passage above, for instance, *un fin tailleur de langue de bois*, literally “a fine tailor of wooden language,” is nonsensical in direct English translation. The idiom *langue de bois*, literally “wooden language,” idiomatically refers to style, but more directly signifies euphemistic or deceptive uses of language,

<sup>7</sup> English idioms associable with this French idiom include feeding someone BS or bull, making someone eat crow, selling snake oil to someone, and selling a bill of goods.

associated in *Le Petit Robert* with *noulangue*, George Orwell's "newspeak" from 1984. An American idiom that might come close is "forked tongue," attributed to indigenous Americans and relating to misdirection through speech, saying one thing and meaning another. This idiom provides an image echoing *couleuvres*, and creates a serpentine field of imagery in a way not readily available in the French. However, we felt "forked tongue" would be too limited in usage (cf. its association with B Westerns from the 1950s, etc., and its concentration on ways of speaking rather than on language use as such), and so settled on "doublespeak" as a more effective way of conveying the idea.

Other idioms that reflect English usage seem too remote. For example, the lines *L'empire que l'on se dispute / en vaut-il la chandelle* that appear toward the end of the poem reflect the English idiom "not worth the candle"—an expression from the Middle Ages referring to work not even deserving candlelight, and so describing something of little significance or value. However, we decided that this phrasing seemed out of date and not reflective of the conversational style Laâbi aims at, so we adopted the outside reader's suggestion. (One might bear in mind that the French language still uses a lot of imagery in its spoken language that might be construed as archaic in English.)

Strategies of inversion are often used in the poem; see for example the passage *De la mer / que je soulève des yeux / et porte à la cime / il s'obstine à ne scruter / que l'abîme*, which we rendered as "When I raise my eyes / from the sea / to the swelling peak / he persists in seeing nothing / but the abyss," or the line *Plus marocain que lui tu meurs*, which we restructured as "You would die more Moroccan than he is," though it could also have been rendered possibly as meaning something like "it would kill you to be more Moroccan" or "You couldn't be more Moroccan." In the latter example we stuck with the image Laâbi uses, as the introduction of "you" here points both to direct address to both the self displaced into second person ("You're a fool," he said to himself") and the (French-speaking) reader, contrasting that reader with the double who "pretends to be Argentinian." Normally the syntax would be *Tu meurs plus marocain que lui*, leading one to consider the role of inverted syntax in the poem. Is there a relation between these inversions and the idea of doubleness? Does it reflect the Arabic orality

underneath the French text? And what is the double but the inverted self that faces you, showing you your other, perhaps unwanted, side, sometimes through the indirection of language?

From another angle, apposition and direct address, and sometimes poetic apostrophe, add theatrical and dialogic dimensions to the text, sometimes reflecting features of 17th century French stylistic structures.<sup>8</sup> Such strategies kill two birds with one stone, as they add both oral and tragic overtones to the text. We may here bear in mind the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, which were largely inspired by classical sources, recalling the classical references in Laâbi's poem. It is important to note that the very language the colonized were exposed to mirrors the coincidental stabilizing of the French language in the 17th century through the formation of the Academy and the first stage of colonial expansion (largely in Canada, India, and Senegal). Even with the second wave of colonization, starting in 1830 with the invasion of Algeria, the "civilizing" aspect of French cultural dominance included concentration on the literary accomplishments of the French classicists.

An interesting phenomenon Guillemette Johnston has noticed about francophone writers is that they combine traditional literary French textual strategies with imagery and material from their own background. Laâbi's writing shows this quality—the investing of idioms and structures with a different spirit and culture. The paratactic style, which is part of the oral aspect of the poem, demonstrated by non-complex structures such as *J'ai donc affaire / à un oiseleur averti / un censeur cultivé / un fin tailleur de langue de bois*, provides echoes of the style found in epic works of both French Trouvères and African Griots, not to mention Homer and other works from the oral tradition. A combination of the hypotactic and the paratactic styles appears in the passage *L'artisan que je suis / soupçonne*

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Corneille's *Horace*, act IV, scene 5, lines 1301–1304, in which Camille directly addresses Rome in poetic apostrophe, characterizing Rome through apposition of the object of address (Rome) with its qualities:

*Rome, l'unique objet de mon ressentiment !  
Rome, à qui vient ton bras d'immoler mon amant !  
Rome qui t'a vue naître, et que ton cœur adore !  
Rome enfin que je hais parce qu'elle t'honore !*

*quelque industrie / des coulevres / que je ne suis pas prêt à avaler.* This latter approach reflects the elaborate constructions of written and spoken French that became more dominant under Louis XIV, while simultaneously embedding internal and end rhymes through the echo of *suis* in *industrie* and of *prêt* in *avalé*. What makes the word play ambiguous here is the lack of punctuation, which introduces indetermination at the syntactic, rhythmic, and referential levels. The complex structuring of the syntax and line breaks enables the poet to isolate the garter snakes—*des coulevres*—in one line, while the word *que* in *que je suis* and *que je ne suis pas prêt à avaler* link both back to *L'artisan*, generating a paratactic style mirrored in the listing of qualities of the *oiseleur averti*, the *censeur cultivé*, and the *fin tailleur de langue de bois*. The disappearance of punctuation and end rhymes built on metrical forms could reflect the stylistic modifications that occurred in 20th-century French poetry. Notably we can think of Jacques Prévert, whose poetry brings back the spoken style via a lack of punctuation, as well as an influence from surrealist poetry, which works by association and the influx of the unexpected rather than through adherence to traditional formal strategies.

Finally, there is also of course the inevitable loss or at least the shifting of sound effects and aural and cultural connections that is characteristic of poetry and fixes it in its specific language of origin. An example of one unavoidable loss appears in the stanza about cultivating the garden, where the sound play between *roses* (“roses”) and *rosée* (“dew”) in the line *me faire l'abeille de mes roses ... pour recueillir la rosée du firmament* disappears. More obvious in this passage will be the allusion to Voltaire's *Candide*, and the characteristic surrealist shifting, as for example between the bamboo leaves that Laâbi describes polishing (...*caresser les feuilles de mon bambou / et les lustrer une à une...*) and the hedge of deforming/deflecting/distorting mirrors (...*une haie / de miroirs déformants*) that is seemingly, and suddenly, planted by the double. Through such strategies we are sucked into a vertiginous movement where both the center of the identity of the writer and the source of the writing produced on the page cannot hold still.

Source text:

Laâbi, Abdellatif. *Mon cher double: poèmes*. Clepsydre/Éditions de la différence, 2007, pp. 9–28.

This book consists of 5 sections listed numerically by Roman numerals I through V, and an epilogue. Only the pieces in section III are named individually. Thus it should be clarified that the title *Mon cher double* could identify the entire collection as well as this individual section. There is no table of contents.