Q/A for *Beyond the Barbed Wire*

Many poets write about despair, but when the poem has nothing urgent to say, it is too nihilistic. Abdellatif Laabi pronounces his talent by writing of loss and struggle while still maintaining an intensity of lifeforce behind his words. As a political prisoner for eight years and later exiled, Laabi has a great love for Arab people and not for the elite who crush their livelihood and the Western countries that accommodate those injustices. *How does Laabi convey urgency and excitement while writing about the struggles of injustice?*

In his poem *To My Son Yacine* Laabi writes letters to his son from inside prison. He writes of the words his son told him saying, “look how I can walk, look where my steps can take me”(Laabi, 78). In two lines, the longing of a father is conveyed swiftly and tragically. He is missing important milestones and the essence of who his son is becoming all at once.

The most heartbreaking moment is when it sinks in that all of the poetic material in the pages is not actually sent to his son. From inside a prison, the only statement he can send out is the first two lines he writes, “My beloved son, I received your letter” (Laabi, 78). This makes the reader cherish every word of struggle that Laabi writes because obviously these words can not be taken for granted. Repeating the juxtaposition of 7 mundane words against stanzas of paternal love and pride make it especially painful to read.

Laabi makes the reader think through the child’s eyes and feel the confusion of his son. He writes, “you started picturing prison the big house where people are locked up who knows for how long and for what reason” (Laabi, 79). The innocence described here puts the reader in the eyes of a child without a father for no good reason. This definitely functions in part as a way to display resentment towards the elite, and the injustice they force onto families in a desensitized way. However he does not let the oppressor win, instead he puts this crime within the larger framework of his love for his son and for life. He ends the poem trying to settle his son’s anger and sadness, telling both himself and his son how they can overcome this terrible time, and the answer he gives is love.