TERRANCE COX

Update for Ibn Rashid

“Whenever a poet emerged in an Arab tribe, the other tribes would come and congratulate it. Feasts would be prepared, and the women would gather together playing on lutes, as people do at weddings; men and boys alike would exchange the good news. For a poet was a defence to their honour, a protection for their good repute; he immortalized their deeds of glory and published their eternal fame.”—Ibn Rashid, 11th century

Allow me here to say—
as there now seems a lull—
how like idiot I feel

sounding words inside of head
words I mouth in whisper
shape as phrase, attentive
hoped-for senses & music—
verandah of a warzone
begging syllables to dance

Eccentric own tribe’s circles—
self-effacing, northern, they
care sweet-fuck-all to find
poets in their midst—

I am imbecile to bother
typing sotto voce thru-out
cease-fire silent verses, many
thousand miles so distant
concerns of any auditor
who, part of process, I suppose

you who somehow
future somewhere happen
on these covert words
language few my fellows in this
epidemic madness read—
no more can I theirs

I am nothing, nonetheless
near as foolish they
of *Falastini*
tribe I dwell amongst:

crazies who revere poets
by memory recite
own whole stanzas of theirs
smuggle in & covet
fugitive verses from exile

Tribe, of late, alas, may not
celebrate emergence
new voice in high old style

No feasts, no *mazel tov*
from neighbours, no
pluck of *oud* applauds
no dance of *dabkeb*
to flutes ensues
beauteous birth of lyrics

Any poets hereabouts
nowadays refrain
harder stuff & ironies:

put this all in Arabic
imperative on record*
apologize for lack
of usual milk & honey*

* Kudos to Malunoud Darwish and As'ad As'ad, Palestinian poets whose words I echo here.
When you are a blasted fool
it is blessing to
have colleagues

more so, as my fingers strike
keys to conjure so
remote a semblant listener
as you again I must
imagine to exist

Afternoon dies & I presume
passing APC's
loud-hailer to proclaim
curfew, dusk-to-dawn—
those wails to keen
for this day's wounded
_Falastini_ children

I seek, please, your advice:

should closing lines of this—
pace Ibn Rashid—be:

"nothing here to honour
local repute never worse
no deeds glorious
& infamous the truth
words useless as defence"

or go out all upbeat
with foolish wish
that these words be

"best, a telling witness"