

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 *dabkeh*  
 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\*

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\* 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”