



**Norman Fischer, *Slowly but Dearly*
CHAX Press, 2004**

Review by Alan Davies

I recently (January of 07) had the pleasure of spending a day in the company of my friends Norman Fischer and Charles Bernstein. Norman and I were reading for - and Charles was interviewing us for - airing on MoMA's radio station and for archiving online at PennSound. Our occasions were separate as it were - but it worked out to have the recording done on the same day - and it was fabulously fortuitous (for me) that it did. The highlight of the day - in addition to the company of my friends - was hearing Norman read his work aloud - something I hadn't had the pleasurable occasion to do for some time.

He read with such measured assurance that no word was lost - indeed there were no cracks in the texts for them to fall through. I had the feeling (a kind feeling) that the works had been created for reading on that particular occasion alone - and they had that resonance as such. I didn't (couldn't) miss a thing. And there was nothing to be missed.

One of the things that I realized was the almost unshakable fervor that the words have within themselves - they don't need to have that spelled out. So there was no bombast - or anything of other particular note - required of Norman to present the poems. He simply read them - and they stood their ground (the ground that had already been prepared for (and by) them).

The poems have the quality of already having been slowed down. They then impart that quality - the listener is slowed down. That should be one of the qualities of all poetry I think - but it often isn't. Here it is. The poems ground us (us (the poems ground us)). Poetry is in this sense a way of learning about pacing - and good poems can help to pace us (so that we don't lose track of us).

□

What's outside mind isn't within range
of that royal discourse
philosophy wants to make
words out to be, standing at the angle
light makes shutting up
meaningful thought reason poured from
the veins of that which is -

First chunk of first poem in *Slowly and Dearly* - and we're
introduced to thought - no - we're in (in (we're in))
thought. To stay. To say. So to say. This kind of
thinking mixed with healthy doses of imagery (*cold stars on
cold beaches*) pervades. Seeing and thinking - informing
each other - the way they do.

Norman dishes up pathos too when it's ambient -

Someone flipped the pages of my journal and found note
of
One happy day of my life in which all the aspects and
shards
Of fitful confusion finally came together in a
beautiful clear way
And ripped that page out as exemplary

Not just that emotion - other feelings too as they impinge
and then let go (or don't). It's all of the moment. I
will say though that there's a kind of laconic humor
throughout - that never (or hardly ever) so much as ripples
(above the noise) - but that gets felt / builds / and
(somehow) lets itself out. A kind of wan humor.

Slow down - slow down. Even as I read and reread I'm
reminded - slow down slow down. And - I do.

I don't believe you can ever go too slow. Some of us even
sit down to prove it. And to make it so.

PHILOSOPHY'S DILEMMA

Dharmakirti great pundit and meditator
Wrote poetry erotic to prove Buddha's Law
That all things grasped are unsatisfactory
Doors fly open, skies clear -
Yet the human situation's anticipation of dissipation
And letting go's not blowing out -

Swimming back to shore again in love with the
possible:
Philosophy's passion of wrenched opposites

It's all over now if we think so - but thinking doesn't
make it so (or does it?). Bowed down - much of the time.
This poetry bows down to lift us up. Thanks!

The poems are most sweetly about life. Can we say that?
Can we say that that way? Yes - we may - we can and we
may. It's life that here sings - not the language per se
(although - here too - they're inseparable that way).
They're life justified.

Life goes on like a gunboat, heavy, loaded, and on
time
and -

So they will know what life was like in the odd days
Life is (after all) something we can only speak of.
Otherwise it's lived events (or something like that
(maybe)). *What cannot be said must be self-evident.* In
the poems aren't statements about life - they are (are
(they are)) life. Instanter than any other way to be we
are.

It's as if the words often sometimes thrill the words.
Having willed them (I suppose). They throw themselves
aloft (as it were) into the air (one way of putting it) and
see where they fall (but only when they do). Some do / not
all.

The poems in some ways often question their own being /
existence. They do that by piling the unexpected on the
unexpected - the unexplained on the unexplained. They are
sort of implosive odes. And perhaps odes to that
implosion. As it exists - in and out of time - in and out
of the poem - for the moment (that being that). In that
way they solve problems (actually) - by exposing them / by
being them. It's an aggressive approach to unbeing - or to
uncertainty about being. The mode is always questioning
(itself in the blink of an eye (not I)). The lines (as
they progress (or simply move)) seem to ask - can it really
be like this? And yet they make it be what it is.

But this cannot be confused with surrealism. Surrealism's
non-sequiturs occurred in the mind and were transferred to
the page. Norman's non-sequiturs occur on the page.

Proves I'm saying this now no kidding

And that language can fuel and shape
What we know to be true and possible

And there are among such spaces occasional magical moments
of epigrammatic purity -

What
Cares contains its value, a half life,
Mixed, no doubt, yet fair.

And these kinds of moments often function as a sort of
exhortation - toward doing better (really) - for any of
those of us willing to listen. And the poems function
often to prepare us for that willingness - by separating us
from what we thought we knew. As if knowledge were even
possible.

Writing in the present moment out of silence and
against the dilemma of language - words undercutting
themselves constantly - which makes every word an
irony - which is my project - comes naturally out of
the increasing impossibility of being able, with my
limited means, to figure anything at all out, draw any
conclusions whatsoever, hold to any serious point of
view (other than hope for clarity and kindness), which
seems as if it is the one thing that is certainly true
and beyond debate and worry - that one doesn't know
but that things *are* - and the fact of not any longer
being organized as a fixed defensible person but
instead relating to experience as it arises.

- from a letter to Leslie Scalapino published as part of
the last text in *Slowly but Dearly*.

Dearly - and - slowly.