



GIRAMONDO PUBLISHING

## Michael Farrell

Launch Speech for Oscar Schwartz's *The Honeymoon Stage*

Monday 14 August 2017

It was a joy to reread Oscar's poems after having read them many times in manuscript. There were surprises, too. New poems, changes, and things I'd forgotten. Who is Goethe? I'd love to hear Rihanna cover "Hot Stuff", too. Poems come out of our bodies in a different way to paintings and differently again to music. Oscar's poems seem like the clear mysteries of virtual expressionism. One thread that runs through *The Honeymoon Stage* are the jokes about time and possibility, that are somehow innocent rather than knowing, yet also assume a reader who gets where things are going, even though their anxiety might be affecting their concentration. There's an element of self-deprecating bathos here, allowing the book's obsessions to be checked: there's only one poem about Kanye West, after all. A honeymoon stage ends when it's theorised. Poems like "untitled" and "you were only six at the time" perfectly encapsulate Sianne Ngai's essay "The Cuteness of the Avant-garde": a goldfish has a heart attack, butterflies turn into razor blades, a woman puts Michael Jackson's towel to her face: we want the honeymoon to last, but it only takes a slip of the image to leave us with a bleeding face. Not that Oscar spells this out any more than Facebook does. If we think of the "you" of the book as representing the reader, the narrating "I" indicates a willingness to go along with the reader's own unique – I could say neurosis – but I'll say poetics (in "the new diet", for example). There's a kind of positive paranoia about the narrator: asking, does this thing I just read or found mean the world will be better? and stating, yes, this means the world will be better. The rotating use of pronouns is as productive as Ashbery's but Oscar's mode is different, less hectic. Or perhaps more relaxed: to quote Jill Jones, a beautiful anxiety. Poetry, as Oscar shows, is one way to enjoy the world, even when things are going wrong. *The Honeymoon Stage* portrays the digital era as being like the world went back to primary school again, mixed in with a high school alienation feeling that we're becoming each other. The internet allows us to set free the affective packages of our personalities in a way that creates a whole other atmosphere to the air we breathe. It's not like this is my hamster, or even I wrote this book, or look at me at eighteen wasn't I cute and fat? It's climate change level emotionality. I write these sentences while looking at a Microsoft Word document, not directly at my browser's open, beating, colourful organs: a memory of the internet from two minutes earlier. Kind of. But if we think other people's insides are polluting then that's a fallacy related to the human as a determined or once-purer entity. The posthuman may be already here, but it's also just out of reach. I'm so entranced by my computer that I don't put on the dressing gown I'm sitting on even though it's freezing. I meant to start writing this first thing, but instead I wrote a poem about reading novels by Nobel Prize winners that reminded me of an Oscar Schwartz poem. In a recent interview, Oscar refers to the tone of his poems as naïve and romantic and internet-derived. I must be following the wrong people on Twitter. It's a leisurely, modulated, take a pill kind of tone. I wrote this speech over two days; the second day I didn't write a poem, but reread some poems to send to *Island* magazine. They sounded very Oscar Schwartz. Better than sounding Malcolm Turnbull (sorry Amelia Dale). A characteristic expression of



this book is “wait”, which means keep going: but also, change track. It’s a key instance of the intimacy of the Schwartz style, the quasi-lullaby of its news before bedtime. If honeymoon + time = disaster movie, honeymoon + internet = poetry. That is irrefutable, if surprising, logic.