Charles Crompton (Shaggy Doo Beats). *Readings from the Little Yellow Book* (Crompton Ink, 2009)

I first encountered Charles Crompton (aka Shaggy Doo Beats) in the late nineties, performing poetry at the Fringe Festival. The performance was memorable because it was delivered with much humour and hilarity, and the poem I remember best is ‘Ode to be a shower curtain’:

It clings to everything  
For it is a tri-sexual  
Its tiny mouths  
Grasping and licking my skin  
… A compulsive nymphomaniac  
Wanting more and more (79)

The words are not profound but they connect with the audience, many of whom have tangled with a clammy shower curtain in their time. When I think of ‘Ode to be a shower curtain’, it is the performance aspect and the humour that are most striking, but now Crompton offers his poems on the page so that the reader who has enjoyed the live show can relive the performance, and those who have not yet had the pleasure may be tempted along to a gig.

Charles Crompton B.O.P. (Bachelor of Poetry) is well known in Adelaide poetry circles as the host of Beat Route – a poetry and jazz night that had its beginnings at the Cargo Club over ten years ago, but has recently been revived as a regular gig at the Dragonfly Bar in Victoria Square. There were also four live improvisational jazz and poetry performances of ‘An Evening With Shaggy Doo Beats & Friends’ at La Boheme in Grote Street in September to complement the new book.

Crompton’s first collection, *Readings from the Little Yellow Book*, was launched by his poetry mentor, Geoff Goodfellow, earlier this year. It contains sixty-nine poems and an entertaining mix of photographs, artwork, posters, and even a kineograph of the little Chihuahua, Dobbin, in the bottom right corner, so that flicking the pages quickly provides an amusing animation. Dobbin also has his own poem, ‘Dobbin the Chihuahua’ – a nonsensical play on words that rhyme with dogs, but obviously a heartfelt tribute to the little fellow. The combination of visual elements with poetry, and the occasional quotation, gives this collection a fun and spontaneous feel. Because these are ‘readings from the little yellow book’ (think Spirax note pad), there is also a sense of this being a book within a book – a glimpse into the poet’s secret scribblings.

Shaggy Doo is Crompton’s alter ego – a take on the character Shaggy, a beatnik teenager, from the cartoon series Scooby Doo. Shaggy is all things beat. The poetry in this collection emulates the beat ‘style’ of the late 1940s and 50s. The notion of a definitive beat style can be debated, but generally calls to mind short, sharp staccato lines, often improvisational, part spoken, part sung, that flow free, that rise like a riff, that play on words and sounds, echo sounds and alliterations, in free form, that gel with jazz and bounce with beat. This is what Shaggy Doo does do, and he does it with
humour. He also marries beat with funk and calls it bunk; he is a self-proclaimed Bunknik.

By way of introduction, *Readings from the Little Yellow Book* includes the poem ‘Hullo, I’m...’ just a few pages in. It begins, ‘An introduction is a bit like / lyposuction / Omitting the bad bits so as to keep / the best bits / The tit bits...’ (7) and ruminates about what an introduction might lead to. ‘Ali J.’ reflects on the fragile and flimsy nature of a particular relationship, where the absent love keeps ‘Popping up in my sideshow / stall subconscious alleyway’ and the narrator is ‘Simply left to blow like a / bubble with its rainbow reflective / glare...’ (9). The act of reflecting on the absence of Ali J. is repeated in the membrane of the bubble simile.

Adelaide artist and deejay drillLer jet Armstrong gets a mention in the ‘Ong’ poem along with all things -ong, and has even provided the accompanying artwork. In ‘Jack Kerouacio’, Kerouac rates a mention, in title only, by the addition of two vowels to force a resonance with other manipulations of language such as chatio, drinkio and loungeio, with the central image being an evening on the patio – itself a forced situation(io) because the speaker is locked out of the house. However, the poem is heavily influenced by Kerouac’s writing style in *Mexico City Blues*, his 1959 book of 242 choruses, written as a jazz poem and performed to the accompaniment of a jazz piano. The style is spontaneous, improvisational, with sound and word associations that echo through Crompton’s work in tribute.

‘Ips’ is an example of free association and rhyme, with most lines being two or three beats. It bears a vague resemblance to Allen Ginsberg’s ‘Hum Bomb’, which derives mainly from its rhythm and sound repetition, although the rhythms and sounds are not identical to those in Ginsberg’s poem. Admittedly, it is a loose association I am making here. ‘Ips’ is arranged in two columns, after the first three lines and before the last three lines, so that part of the poem can be read in two ways – either down each column, or across two columns, thus altering the beat. There is no logic and it is impossible to grasp a coherent thread, but maybe that is the point. The poem begins with ‘Paper clips’, shifts from paper to ‘Acid trips’ on the fourth line, suggestively throws in ‘Leather whips’ and ‘Sordid quips’ but winds down with a girl skipping through tulips and ends with the repetition of ‘nnp nnp...’(31). It is likely that this works very well in performance, with the repetition of sounds creating its own music, but on the page it may confound the reader.

Ultimately, this is performance poetry and while it is pleasing to be able to capture it in print it is clearly poetry that comes to life on the stage, accompanied by a jazz trio perhaps. As such, it would be well complemented by a CD, or a trip to one of Shaggy Doo’s performances. Stay tuned as there are plans for a spoken word/live jazz CD in the future.

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