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## **The Boy Who Wanted to Become Bunny Berigan The Thought of Death**

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VO POEMS by Valdemar Olaguer

The Boy Who Wanted To Become Bunny Berigan

1

"Narcissus" without a pool  
Admires himself at  
A serious art

The cold trombone

An instrument for lip-reading;

*Idee fixe*

For the larynx,

Glass in an exhibit of

Gyrating images;

On a rotating dais, with floodlights—

Play to the Oslo *Storthing*;

Then swing a wild arc

Through the Low Countries;

Astound Italian *condotierri*;

Secularize the Escorial

With enormous talent at the blues,

Get borne into Seville

Like a famed *matador*.

Thus went Orpheus

On a summer jazz tour

Through the underworld . . .

2

What carries in that floating world  
 (The Windy City heard)?  
 There was a medieval twang  
 And clash of parliaments over primitive affairs;  
 Horses whinnied in the dark.  
 An observer said, "That is the language of inverted minds,"  
 "A fantasy play, a fiction powerhouse!"

"My verdict? Cross between virtuoso and plain disc-jockey.  
 He played Berigan *primus* all through the night."

"And his bust of Berigan was creamy..."

Neighbors kept dashing bric-a-brac against the walls.

3

The Berigan blues  
 Bleat and wax  
 Against the windows, five flights up  
 Where Charon, leaning on an oar  
 Listens wilfully (winter night)  
 For a singular depth in all that wail  
 And wilderness,  
 Wondering what he might recall  
 And carry from that polar sea  
 To Pluto's realm and classic shore.

## *The Thought of Death*

assaulted me.  
because I could not choke or breathe  
for dwelling on this unusual chief  
who importunes all (like harridan or harlot)  
to share one luminous experience.

To besiege all to take one in the joy of  
his priming,  
and generally exhaust the items in his bag of tricks,  
he looks up endless lists and registers  
and knows unerringly the moment  
when by a host of indirections  
one can stoop by that low door  
for the illumination.

You can match his insularity with statistics  
and his pride will crumple fast

before a cycle of sunless songs.

(I would bring something more difficult,  
less abstract than he and his  
lemans could chew,

say, a brooch of carnelian  
or even a clarinet concerto  
for many virtuoso sittings—  
but the question of whether this  
be tariff or tribute,  
bribe-piece or trickery  
would arise;

I'd carry just a waiting urn  
enwound with cypress.)

Fix his figure:

he is the universal paramour  
of a black and dubious sanctimony

with a reed pipe that he plays,  
a cloak against the nether wind  
and a riding stick—

He skirts the breathless land  
jingling usurious coins  
paid for admission to a kingdom's  
time and interest;  
reciting mystical rules for deportment  
of men among mystics of *punctilio*.

So why equate one's fears with statistics  
or begin on lamentations of a premature command?  
It is enough that one should visibly expand  
at the idea of this ennobling  
*risorgimento*.