



The Selected Poetry of Emilio Villa

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While Emilio Villa (1914-2003) was referred to as Zeus because of his greatness and Rabelais because of his mental voracity, for decades his work remained in oblivion, only recently surfacing to reveal him to be one of the most formidable figures of the Italian Novecento, if not of world culture. His marginalization was in part self-inflicted, due to his sibylline nature if not to his great erudition, which gave rise to a poetics so unconventional that few knew what to make of it: a biblicist who composed experimental verse in over ten different languages, including tongues from Milanese dialect and Italian to French, Portuguese, ancient Greek, and even Sumerian and Akkadian. As Andrea Zanzotto declared, "From the very beginning, Villa was so advanced that, even today, his initial writings or graphemes appear ahead of the times and even the future, suspended between a polymorphous sixth sense and pure non-sense." In merging his background as a scholar, translator, and philologist of ancient languages with his conception of poetics, Villa creates the sensation that, when reading his work, we are coming into contact with language at its origins, spoken as if for the first time, with endless possibilities. Whether penning verse, translating Homer's *Odyssey*, or writing on contemporary or primordial art, Villa engages in a paleoization of the present and a modernization of the past, wherein history is abolished and interpretation suspended, leaving room only for the purely generative linguistic act, one as potent today as it was eons ago. This volume of Villa's multilingual poetry ranges across his entire writing life and also includes selections from his translation of the Bible, his writings on ancient and modern art, and his visual poetry. Presented in English for the very first time, *The Selected Poetry of Emilio Villa* also contains material that is rare even to Italian readers. In adhering to the original notion of poetry as making, Villa acts as the poet-faber in tandem with his readers, creating *une niche dans un niche* for them to enter and create within, as if language itself were an eternal and infinite void in which creation remains an ever possible and continuously new event. * As the universe expands and its galaxies grow further apart with a speed proportionate to their respective distances, so does the linguistic universe of Emilio Villa. - Adriano Spatola

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