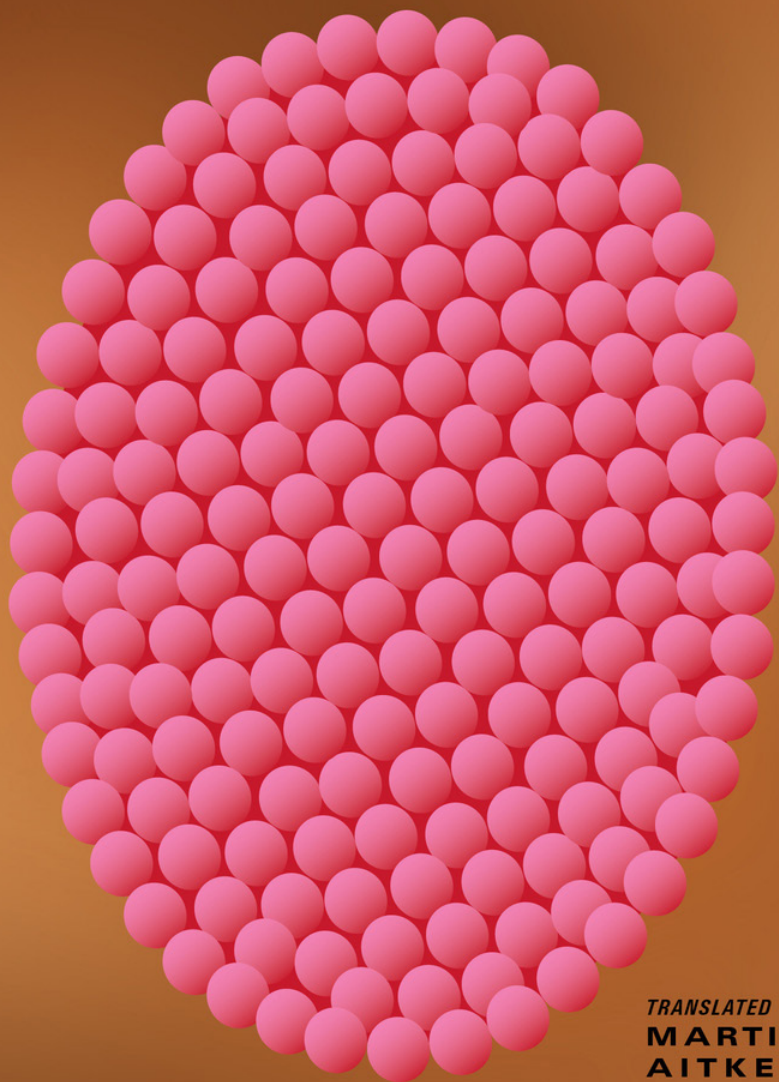


Shortlisted
The 2021 International Booker Prize

THE EMPLOYEES



Oigja Ravn

TRANSLATED BY
**MARTIN
AITKEN**

THE EMPLOYEES

a workplace novel

of the twenty-second century

Olga Ravn

translated from the Danish

by Martin Aitken

Book*hug Press
Toronto 2022

FIRST CANADIAN EDITION

Copyright © Olga Ravn & Gyldendal, Copenhagen 2018

Translation copyright © Martin Aitken, 2020

This edition is published by arrangement
with New Directions Publishing.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in
any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including
photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval
system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: *The employees* : a workplace novel of the twenty-second century /
Olga Ravn ; translated by Martin Aitken.

Other titles: *Ansatte*. English

Names: Ravn, Olga, author. | Aitken, Martin, translator.

Series: Literature in translation series.

Description: Series statement: Literature in translation series |
Translation of: *De ansatte*.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20210375728 | Canadiana (ebook)
20210375736

ISBN 9781771667609 (softcover)

ISBN 9781771667616 (EPUB)

ISBN 9781771667623 (PDF)

Classification: LCC PT8177.28.A87 A8313 2022 | DDC 839.813/8—dc23

Book*hug Press acknowledges that the land on which we operate is
the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas
of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and
the Wendat peoples. We recognize the enduring presence of many
diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and are grateful for the
opportunity to meet, work, and learn on this territory.

Book*hug Press

*With thanks to Lea Guldditte Hestelund
for her installations and sculptures, without
which this book would not exist*

The following statements were collected over a period of eighteen months, during which time the committee interviewed the employees with a view to gaining insight into how they related to the objects and the rooms in which they were placed. It was our wish by means of these unprejudiced recordings to gain knowledge of local workflows and to investigate possible impacts of the objects, as well as the ways those impacts, or perhaps relationships, might give rise to permanent deviations in the individual employee, and moreover to assess to what degree they might be said to precipitate reduction or enhancement of performance, task-related understanding, and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, thereby illuminating their specific consequences for production.

STATEMENT 004

It's not hard to clean them. The big one, I think, sends out a kind of a hum, or is it just something I imagine? Maybe that's not what you mean? I'm not sure, but isn't it female? The cords are long, spun from blue and silver fibres. They keep her up with a strap made out of calf-coloured leather with prominent white stitching. What colour is a calf, actually? I've never seen one. From her abdomen runs this long, pink, cord-like thing. What do you call it? Like the fibrous shoot of a plant. It takes longer to clean than the others. I normally use a little brush. One day she'd laid an egg. If I'm allowed to say something here, I don't think you should have her hung up all the time. The egg had cracked when it dropped. The egg mass was on the floor underneath her and the thready end of the shoot was stuck in the egg mass. I ended up removing it. I haven't told anyone before now. Maybe that was a mistake. The next day there was a hum. Louder than that, like an electric rumble. And the day after that she was quiet. She hasn't made a sound since then. Is there some kind of sadness there? I always use both hands. I couldn't say if the others have heard anything or not. Mostly I go there when everyone's asleep. It's no problem keeping the place clean. I've made it into my own little world. I talk to her while she rests. It might not look like much. There are only two rooms. You'd probably say it was a small world, but not if you have to clean it.

STATEMENT 012

I don't like to go in there. The three on the floor seem especially hostile, or maybe it's indifference. As if by being so deeply indifferent they want to hurt me. I can't understand why I feel I've got to touch them. Two of them are always cold, one is warm. You never know which is going to be the warm one. It's as if somehow they recharge each other, or take turns to exchange their energy. Sometimes I'm not sure if they're all one or if they're three separate ones. Three individual units attuned to one another. I've seen intimacy between them. It frightens me, I hate it. I've known many more like them. It's as if, at any time, one of them can always be the others. As if they don't actually exist on their own, but only in the idea of one another. They can multiply whenever they like, in bunches and clusters. On the hillsides they can resemble a kind of eczema. But as I said, I don't like to go in there. They make me touch them, even if I don't want to. They've got a language that breaks me down when I go in. The language is that they're many, that they're not one, that one of them is the reiteration of all of them.