The mechanical body: Mankind and machines in *La macchina mondiale* by Paolo Volponi

The Italian word for “body” is “corpo”, which derives from the Latin word “corpus” (complex organism). If the noun “organism” clearly reminds us of a living creature, the qualitative adjective “complex” can be applied to both living things and machines. At the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, the mechanical and the natural aspects of the word “corpo” came together in the novel *La macchina mondiale* by the Italian writer and poet Paolo Volponi, published in 1965 by Garzanti and awarded with the Premio Strega that same year. The main character is the Italian peasant Anteo Crocioni, a modern Don Quixote who is passionate about philosophical and scientific texts. Even as a child, he has always challenged the world with his questions, refusing to obey to the social rules which want him to be a simple worker.

When the book first came out, Volponi was CEO at Olivetti Inc. after the premature death of Adriano Olivetti in 1960. Having worked for a decade in the factory’s offices, Volponi had developed a particular interest in the existing relationships between mankind, work and machines. This was already clear in his first novel, *Memoriale* (1962), but it is in *La macchina mondiale* that the human body takes on importance. In this novel, the world itself is seen as a complex mechanism ruled by “authors-automatons” and, as the story goes on, even the body starts to be described as a machine, a “corpus” in the Latin sense of the word: a complex organism which is mechanical and alive at the same time. In these pages, the human body becomes a kind of device that can be mounted and unmounted in the manner of a modern toy.

Biographical note

Bianca Rita Cataldi was born in Bari, Italy, in 1992. In 2014 she graduated in Modern Literature at Università degli Studi di Bari “Aldo Moro”, where in 2016 she took her specialization in Modern Philology. She is now a PhD candidate at the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics of University College Dublin. The focus of her research is the impact of literature and utopia on industrialized Italy and Europe in the twentieth century. She is supported by Dr. Ursula Fanning (main supervisor, School of Languages) and Dr. Danielle Pethersbridge (co-supervisor, School of Philosophy). Her essay “Mosche senza volo: l’utopia di Adriano Olivetti” has been published by the Italian academic review “Incroci: Semestrale di letteratura e alter scritture” in December 2017.