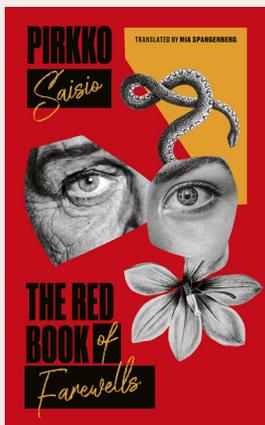


THE RED BOOK OF FAREWELLS

Pirkko Saisio, translated from Finnish by Mia Spangenberg

1. *The Red Book of Farewells* begins with a scene in which the author, vacationing on blistering hot Finnish islands, tells her editor she has accidentally deleted her most recent manuscript. What does this first farewell suggest about the narrative to come and, for example, whether it is autobiography or autofiction?
2. *Red Book's* narrator uses both the first and third person. Late in the novel, the first-person narrator comments, "There's not enough there to share, not in the first person. So," then continues in third person (pg. 184). How does the novel make use of both first- and third-person narration and to what ends? How does the novel understand the relationship between them?
3. Kissing the clown-eyed girl in a secret basement bar, the narrator remarks, "I'm a criminal" (pg. 35). How does the novel portray the experience of queer life in 1970s Finland, where homosexuality was a crime? When it is later decriminalized, what contributes to the narrator's feeling that this is another kind of farewell?
4. Spending time in various social groups—for example the theater collective and the theater school—gives the narrator perspective on the contexts and motivations of her peers' involvement in socialist politics. What are some of the distinctions, conflicts, and solidarities between these communities?
5. There are many real and metaphorical doors in the novel. For example, when Havva first says she's attracted to her, the narrator "does what she knows how to do: she closes the door" (pg. 156). What does the act of closing a door mean to the narrator?
6. *The Red Book of Farewells* features sharp and colorful details of domestic life: the green room full of books, a yellow dress, a blue coat, strawberries in wilted whipped cream, a mahjong board. How does the novel portray domesticity and the relationship between the domestic and socialist politics?
7. In addition to writing novels, Pirkko Saisio is an acclaimed actor and playwright. What forms, techniques, and strategies from the world of performance are on display in the novel?
8. Near the novel's end, the narrator is asked to choose between her relationship with Havva and her credibility as an actor and a revolutionary. Despite remaining together seven more years and having a child together, the narrator blames her handling of this situation for their eventual break-up. Is this fair? How do the narrator and Havva each balance their personal feelings and collective commitments?



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