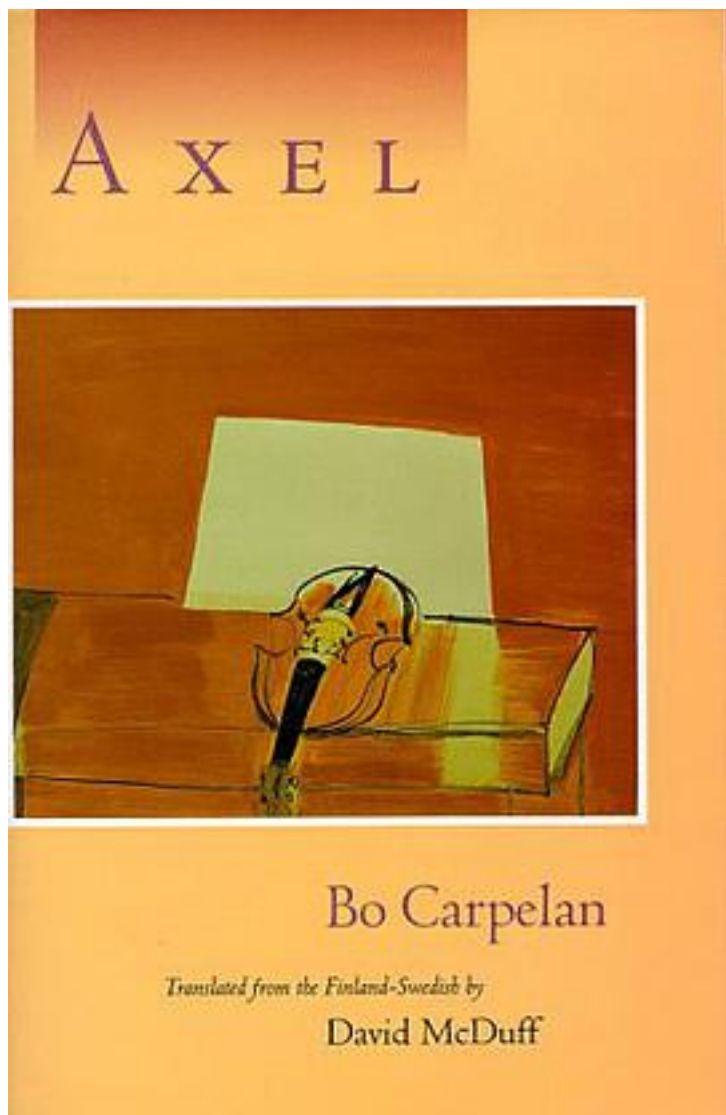


Axel



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In the 1930s, Bo Carpelan found mention of his great-uncle Axel in a biography of the composer Jean Sibelius. This friendship is the genesis of Carpelan's fictional diary of Axel's dual obsession with music and with a man who, unlike him, had enough confidence in his creativity to compose his own. In Carpelan's novel, set during Finland's struggle to escape Russian colonization, young Axel's life is full of melancholic introspection communicated only to his diary. The diary is filled with short entries from adolescence describing antagonism toward the healthier and more joyous children around him, and his embarrassment at his futile attempts to coax beauty from his violin. His unrelenting disappointment and self-effacement give way after actually meeting his hero Sibelius, as Axel's search for meaning and an aesthetic ideal become forever linked to the unfolding of the composer's musical genius. Reminiscent of Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* and Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno*, and packed with the same densely poetic language found in Kafka's *Diaries*, Carpelan's *Axel* explores the spiritual awakening of a young man in the context of the awakening an entire nation.

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