

# WORLD LITERATURE TODAY

FORMERLY BOOKS ABROAD

A LITERARY QUARTERLY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF OKLAHOMA  
NORMAN, OKLAHOMA  
73019 U.S.A.

FROM THE

## SPRING 1983

ISSUE

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Elio Bartolini. *Il Palazzo di Tauride*. Milan. Rusconi. 1982. 135 pages. 7,000 l.

A prolific novelist such as Elio Bartolini—several novels since 1949, plus scripts for television and cinema—could not fail when he tackled the subject of two women, activists in the 1960s, who meet again in the present and compare notes, realizing that their lives are somewhat suspended between the struggles of the past and a future which presents itself as out of focus. To the present there is no solution.

A luxury hospital has here been given the name of Il Palazzo di Tauride, the ancient seat of the Duma from which Lenin made many of his proclamations. This hospital is a comfortable place for the upper middle class to take refuge and try to mend its ills. It is here that most of the action occurs, principally in a small single room where Mirta lies in bed vainly waiting for the doctors' verdict. The tests are always negative. Her friend Anna, who fought on the front lines with her for the establishment of a new society, stops for a visit while on her way to another destination. The entire novel takes place within a few hours and consists mostly of dialogues, the majority of which are between Mirta and Anna. The present does not reflect the past, nor does it clearly predict a different future. These two relatively young women are left with an internal gnawing that seems to lead them toward destruction or self-destruction. They seek help from each other, especially Mirta, who contemplates suicide and begs Anna to provide her with some means for a quick death.

The dialogue is vivid at all times. The memories of the past have paled; acts of terrorism are hardly mentioned. The novel reads well. It could be a good script for a half-hour television program.

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