

2. "TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE"

“Even if you’ve met a lot of friends, why do you feel alone? So what’s the use of all these friends?”

XXVII. I know what it means to be a man without a woman, to believe in one, to belong to one, and yet not have her, to spend even years without being a man with a woman, and then to take one who is not yours, and so to have her, in a hotel room to have your desert, instead of love.

This is the most squalid of deserts; not of a life that is lacking, but of a life that is not life. You were thirsty, and you can drink; there’s water. You were hungry, and you can eat; there’s bread. There’s the spring, and palm trees around it, similar to what you were looking for.

But it is only similar to the thing. It is not the thing itself. »

» “What did you want?” I ask myself. I eat, and it’s dust that I eat, not bread. I drink, and it’s dust that I drink. I lean over the bed in front of me, and once I didn’t even undress, just smoked the whole time, resting on the headboard, in front of that desert.

Man remembers his thirst.

“Oh thirst!” I think. I have quenched my thirst, but I’m still thirsty. I’ve only dirtied my thirst. Leaning over the bed I drink. I think I’m humble in this. I think that I’m on my knees, but I know that my ferocity was my purity.

Why did I have pity on myself? This humility does not save a man. He has nobody with him. He is on his knees not in love, but in his desert.

(Elio Vittorini, *Uomini e no [Men and Not]*, Mondadori, Milan 2016)