

BOTTLE FOUND AT SEA*

Lost as I am by the edge of this profound lake in which is mirrored an unknown sky, shall I ever attain the linking of my existence with the human centuries whose faint trail seems scarcely to penetrate these regions? Even the sense of time is forgotten: whether I go toward yesterday or tomorrow, there is no way of knowing. And these words suggest nothing more, since it is impossible to tell whether the ages have been arrested forever or whether their flight has been hastened with the uniformly accelerated rapidity of a body approaching the sun. If only I had a watch with me to end this uncertainty. A diffuse light reigns eternally over this world and the sun that is of space as well as of time has deserted this immutable firmament. The lovely liquid expanse which composes my horizon rounds out toward the west and receives at the northwest a stream that flows from the north. As far as I can ascertain with the aid of my compass, its direction seems to be north-northeast by south-southwest. But how to measure its extent? I have made the circumference of the lake several times without arriving at even the haziest idea as to the year or minute of the length of the voyage. At first glance I had estimated the circumference to be a hundred miles. Later conjectures brought this figure up from a hundred to a hundred and fifty or a hundred and sixty miles. The actual span must be somewhere between these two numbers. Nor can the time that I place at the disposal of this investigation serve as a yard-stick: it comprises anything from a few sparse thoughts to a desert of ennui and vexation. The beatings of my pulse inform me no better, their irregularities born no doubt of the helplessness in which I find myself to appraise equivalents amid such astounding phenomena. The vegetation in its development follows no habitual or logical order of growth. There are trees here which grow downward, flowers that give forth leaves, buds that the wind carries off to make a carpet for me.

* Fragment from *Telamaque*, a novel to be published this spring. Translated from the French by Will Bray.