

# The Voice

By Charles Baudelaire

I grew up in the shadow of a big bookcase: a tall  
Babel, where verses, novels, histories, row upon row—  
The immemorial ashes of Greek and Latin—all  
Mingled and murmured. When I was as high as a folio,  
I heard two voices speaking. The first one said: “Be wise;  
The world is but a large, delicious cake, my friend!  
It calls for an appetite of corresponding size—  
And whoso heeds my counsel, his joys shall have no end.”  
The other voice spoke softly: “Come, travel with me in  
[dreams,  
Far, far beyond the range of the possible and the known!”  
And in that voice was the senseless music of winds and  
[streams  
Blown suddenly out of nowhere and into nowhere blown—  
A phantom cry, a sound to frighten and captivate.  
And I replied: “I will, O lovely voice! “ And from  
That hour was sealed for ever the disastrous fate  
Which still attends me: Always, behind the tedium  
Of finite semblances, beyond the accustomed zone  
Of time and space, I see distinctly another world—  
And I must wear with loathing these mortal toils, as one  
Dragging a weight of serpents about his ankles curled.  
And from that hour, like the old prophets of Palestine,  
I love extravagantly the wilderness and the sea;  
I find an ineffable joy in the taste of harsh, sour wine;  
I smile at the saddest moments; I weep amid gaiety;  
I take facts for illusions—and often as not, with my eyes  
Fixed confidently upon the heavens, I fall into holes.  
But the Voice comforts me: “Fool, guard thy dreams! The  
[wise  
Have none so beautiful as thou hast.” And the Voice consoles.