**The Man Who Raved at the Wall**

Who was this man whose raving at the wall so captured Roger Waters' imagination? Although Waters probably never went beyond Graham's anthology, it is useful to go back to look at the character who inspired the line.

The 'man who raved at the wall' was none other than China's oldest major poet, Qu Yuan 屈原 Qū Yuán (often spelt Ch'ü Yüan after the old system of romanisation). Qu Yuan was born in the kingdom of Chu (or Ch'u) in 340 BC, roughly 2,340 years before our time and 1,150 years before [Li He](http://www.cjvlang.com/Pfloyd/liho.html)'s. Like Li He, he was unsuccessful in life, but the consequences were much graver than merely being excluded from the bureaucracy.

At the time Qu Yuan was alive, China consisted of seven states fighting for dominance of the known civilised world. Chu was the southernmost state, located in the Yang-tse Valley. It lay on the southern fringe of Chinese culture of the time, being located in an area of exotic plants and shamanistic religion. Qu Yuan was a court noble who tried to gain the support of the king of Chu in maintaining the state's independence against the aggressive designs of the state of Qin, a warlike state in the dusty northwest. He failed due to corruption and intrigue and was eventually ousted from the court. After this, Chu went into terminal decline. Its capital was sacked in 278 BC and it lost its independence half a century later to the forces of Qin in 223 BC. Qin's victory resulted in the unification of China under the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang.

Qu Yuan wrote poetry lamenting the state of his country. His laments took the form of political allegory expressing his grief and censuring his ruler. After the Chu capital was sacked by the Qin when he was aged 62, Qu Yuan took his own life in despair by throwing himself into the Miluo River (modern-day Hunan). (Or at least, this is the traditional interpretation. In his introduction to the Penguin Book of Chinese Verse, A. R. Davis disputes the typically Confucian view that much of Qu Yuan's work was political allegory.)

Although Qu Yuan is unfamiliar to most Westerners, he is said to be the inspiration behind a well-known Chinese festival: the Dragon Boat Festival of 5th day of the 5th month (generally around June in our solar calendar). At this time in the south of China Dragon Boats re-enact the way Qu Yuan's body was recovered by the people of Chu. Dumplings wrapped in leaves are eaten on this day. These were originally thrown in the water to distract the dragons and serpents from eating Qu Yuan's body.

One of Qu Yuan's more remarkable poems is the 'Heavenly Questions', which asks over 170 questions about the universe, the creation of the heavenly bodies, the earth, myths and legends, and historical events. These 'raving questions' were said to have been written on the walls of the shrines of former kings and the ancestral halls of the nobles of the state of Chu. According to Graham, the preface to the 'Heavenly Questions' contains the following passage:

Why not call them 'Questions to Heaven'? Heaven is too august to be questioned, so he called them 'Heavenly Questions'. Ch'ü Yüan in exile, his anxious heart wasted with cares, roamed among the mountains and marshes, crossed over hills and plains, crying aloud to the Most High, and sighing as he looked up at heaven. He saw in Ch'u the shrines of the former kings and the ancestral halls of the nobles, painted with pictures of heaven and earth, mountains and rivers, gods and spirits, jewels and monsters, and the wonders and the deeds of ancient sages. When he tired of wandering among them he rested beneath them; and he took the pictures which he saw above him as themes for writing on the walls his raving questions.

The 'Heavenly Questions' has been translated into English rhymed verse by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang under the title 'The Riddle'. The translation has the defect of being long-winded and rhymed whereas the original Chinese is quite terse. Nevertheless, it has the advantage of being totally different in style from Graham's translation of Li He. As Graham himself points out in his preface to *Poems of the Late T'ang*, all Chinese poets tend to sound the same when translated by the same person. This translation gives the (correct) impression that the 'Heavenly Questions' were written in a very different era from Li He's.

**The Riddle**

Ere creation, who could tell  
All the changes that befell?  
What strange arts can be employed  
To know what passed when all was void?  
Ere light and darkness merged in space,  
Who can fathom what took place?  
Things impalpable that swarmed,  
Who can tell how they were formed?  
How can it be that day and light  
Can be born of dark and night?  
Female power, power male,  
By what force did they prevail?  
Vast the firmament nine-sphered,  
By what craftsman was it reared?  
Who conceived a scheme so grand?  
What was the creator's hand  
That great axle could suspend?  
Whereon does the dome depend?  
Whereon are earth's pillars set?  
Why slopes down the Southeast yet?  
Whereon are the nine spheres rolled?  
What divisions do they hold?  
Who the planets' course defines?  
Or who chose the zodiac signs?  
Set the sun and moon on high?  
Constellations hung nearby?  
From the east rides up the sun,  
In the west its course is done;  
From pale dawn till all is black,  
Who can measure out its track?  
Say what virtue has the moon,  
That it wanes then waxes soon?  
Of what service is its toad?  
What the gift on it bestowed?

Whence did she, all mates denied,  
Get the nine sons by her side?  
Whence come pestilence and bane?  
Whence the air that keeps men sane?  
Who binds up the sun at night,  
Lets it out to shed its light?  
Tell me how the sprite of rain  
Causes showers to fall amain?  
How is it the whirlwind sprite  
Races like a stag in flight?  
How can mountains carried be  
By tortoises beneath the sea?  
How, when these were lured away,  
Still floating did the mountains stay?

How were the nine continents laid,  
Stream beds sunk and valleys made?  
Why, since all streams eastward go,  
Do no oceans overflow?  
North and south, are they as far  
As east and west divided are?  
Hanging gardens hover fair,  
What supports them in the air?  
Who can measure them aright?  
What the nine-tiered Kunlun's height?  
Who defends its portals great  
What wind passed the Northwest Gate?  
Is there any place at all  
Where the sun's rays never fall?  
In that realm of pitchy night  
Does the dragon shed his light?  
Ere the rising of the sun,  
By what tree is brightness spun?  
Where does winter seem to blaze,  
Summer show but chilly days?  
Stony Forest how to reach,  
Or the beasts with human speech?  
Where do savage cobras stay,  
With nine heads that dart and play?  
Where the race that never dies?  
What is it the giants prize?  
Where does the great flower grow  
With its nine-hued blooms aglow?  
Snakes that elephants devour,  
What must be their size and power?  
There's a land with murky streams  
Where a dark-foot people teems;  
Since from death they are secure,  
How long must their lives endure?  
Whither has the mermaid fled?  
Griffin too with hoary head?  
Who shot nine suns from the sky?  
Where did moulted plumage lie?

Who was it that paved the way  
For the first king to hold sway?  
Who made the Nu Wa, once a snake,  
Every hour new features take?  
Shun by music won the field,  
Forced barbarians to yield.  
How could this have come about?  
What meat made the tribesmen stout?

Why, when Kun had shown no skill,  
Was he sent the flood to still?  
Why let the mob this choice decide,  
And send him out as yet untried?  
When tortoises his work effaced,  
Why was Kun the one disgraced?  
Why, when he might win success,  
Was he plunged in such distress?  
How, when sent far off to die,  
Did he cross the cliffs so high?  
What witch raised him from the dead  
To become a bear instead?  
He bade men sow millet seeds,  
Clear the undergrowth and weeds;  
Why was banishment his fate?  
Why did he incur men's hate?  
Three years in the feathered hill,  
Dead, he stayed unrotted still.  
From Kun's loins great Yu did spring;  
Was he destined change to bring?  
Kun's task fell to Yu his son,  
In his work success he won;  
But what was his different plan  
When his labours he began?  
Heavy floods had swept the plain,  
How did he the water drain?  
Nine great mountains stood upright;  
How did he rear up their height?  
What chart did the dragon draw  
To lead rivers to the shore?  
Whence the dragon with no horn  
On whose back the bear was borne?  
What great task did Kun begin?  
What successes did Yu win?  
And why did the warrier grim  
Tilt the earth's southeastern rim?  
God sent Yu to earth below,  
Bitter trials to undergo;  
Why should he with mountain maid  
In soft dalliance have stayed?  
Offspring of their union came:  
Why did they think lust no shame?

Chi usurped the throne of Yi,  
Killed his former enemy;  
All his former failures past,  
How did he succeed at last?  
Why could Prince Yi not prevail,  
Why was he condemned to fail?  
Proper reverence Chi showed,  
Sacrificed with dance and ode;  
His mother turned to stone one morn;  
How then was their infant born?

Heaven sent down the Archer King  
To drive out each evil thing.  
Why shoot the God? What was his pride,  
Or hope to make the nymph his bride?  
With huge bow and arrows keen  
He shot boars in the ravine.  
Was the Heavenly Emperor wroth  
At his sacrifice of broth?  
When his concubine and slave  
Planned to kill the Archer brave,  
Why did he deserve defeat?  
And his flesh why did they eat?  
The rainbow maiden, is it true  
That she was his consort too?  
Whence did she the elixir steal?  
And why not herself steal?

Great Nature's laws all change defy,  
Life runs its course and all must die.  
How was the slayer, executed,  
Transformed into a bird which hooted?

Why did Chiao lead a wanton life?  
Why should he seek his brother's wife?  
And who was it let loose his hound,  
And smote Chiao's head down to the ground?  
The wicked whore his garments made,  
The guilty pair together stayed.  
Whose hand at last the woman slew?  
How did she meet disaster too?  
Why did the slave, rebellious then,  
Show kindness to the Archer's men?  
When hostile vessels Chiao capsized,  
How was his stratagem devised?

When Chieh quelled the mountain men,  
What two women found he then?  
Wherefore did his queen betray him?  
Why should Tang atempt to slay him?  
Offering a cup of jade,  
Sacrifice to God he made.  
As King of Hsia he ruled so long,  
Why was he subdued by Tang?  
When God came to scan the earth,  
And discerned a man of worth,  
What was Chieh's punishment?  
Were the people well content?

Had the prince some secret power  
To tempt the princess in the tower?  
The phoenix brought two eggs to earth:  
Did this cause the virgin birth?

Shun was married. Why should he  
Always know as wifeless be?  
Why did Yao two girls present,  
Nor obtain his sire's consent?  
Shun had lent his brother aid,  
Yet a plot the traitor laid.  
Why should one so like a beast  
Not have suffered in the least?  
Coveting his brother's wife,  
He conspired to take Shun's life.  
Why should his posterity  
Know such great prosperity?

King Hai, like his sire humane,  
Lost his cattle and was slain.  
How were cowherds to him led?  
Who destroyed him on the bed?  
Heng his brother had a herd   
But, unlike King Hai, he erred.  
Why did he seek selfish gain,  
Nor avenge his brother slain?  
When Wei learned his wicked ways,  
Yi's land fell on evil days.  
Why did he give rain to lust,  
When his foes lay in the dust?  
Tang went to an eastern land,  
All the realm of Hsin he scanned.  
An able man was all he sought,  
Why was a helpmate to him brought?  
By a stream that gently wound,  
In a tree a child was found.  
Why was he believed a knave?  
Given to the bride as slave?  
Who can tell the fault of Tang,  
That he was imprisoned long?  
What coercion could compel  
One so reluctant to rebel?  
As Tang's man Yi Yin began,  
Left him to become Chieh's man:  
But when back to Tang he came,  
Why did he attain such fame?

Why did the last king of Shang  
Listen to the slandering throng?  
How did men foresee his fall?  
Who raised up his tower tall?  
Why should loyal men be slain,  
Flatterers rewards obtain?  
Why should holy sages two  
Such divergent paths pursue?  
One feigned madness, saved his life;  
One was butchered with the knife.  
How did all men meet that day?  
Why flocked birds of plumage grey?  
The Duke of Chou, though loath to fight,  
Quelled with ease the foeman's might.  
Why did Heaven bestow so long  
Kingship on the House of Shang?  
What transgression caused Shang's fall?  
Why rose up his subjects all?  
Who led troops in their attack,  
Beat the enemy forces back?

Though the first-born, little Ji,  
Won his father's enmity,  
Why to avert his sacrifice,  
Did birds shield him on the ice?  
How did he, an archer then,  
Live to be a chief of men?  
If he angered God on high,  
How did he win prosperity?

King Wen, in cowherd's costume clad,  
Had herded cattle as a lad.  
How did his influence extend  
Till Shang was conquered in the end?  
What made aupporters rally still  
When he moved up upon the hill?  
Why should men blame the king of Shang,  
Whose passion for his wife was so strong?  
Mincemeat was made of King Wen's son,  
Wen prayed that vengeance should be done;  
How did his angry prayers and hate  
Move Heaven at last to seal Shang's fate?  
Finding the butcher in the throng,  
Why did Wen smile to hear his song?  
Why should King Wu have sighed that day  
When slain his adversary lay?  
And when to join the fight he sped,  
Why did he bear his father dead?  
Cheo hanged himself to escape disgrace,  
Was it for fear he veiled his face?  
Did Heaven decree that this be done?  
Or why are kingdoms lost or won?

King Chao upon a journey went,  
For southern regions he was bent.  
But could the army prosper, say,  
That met white peasants on the way?

Mu was a grasping monarch too,  
Why did he rove the whole world through?  
He toured his realm from east to west:  
What was the object of his quest?

What was the merchandise so rare,  
Sold by the stranger at the fair?  
By whom was King Yiu's blood spilt?  
Why was his favourite charged with guilt?

Idly mortals' fates are spelt,  
Life or death are idly dealt.  
The duke was made the baron's head,  
Till an assassin struck him dead.

Did Peng find favour in God's eyes  
For pheasant broth as sacrifice?  
And if he lived eight hundred years,  
What reason did he have for tears?  
Does Heaven decree that states shall fight?  
Why do small things possess such might?

Two princes lived on herbs alone,  
Till scoffed by a maid unknown;  
But how then, as they wandered here,  
Were they both suckled by a deer?  
North to the stream they made their way,  
What joy did meeting hold that day?

What looked the prince with envious eyes?  
His brother's hound why should he prize?  
He offered chariots in its stead,  
But at the last he lost his head.

Two princes sought a southern sky,  
Why did they their country fly?  
How did the young prince, exiled long,  
Win great renown when he was strong?

Where did the young prince lie concealed,  
Who later quelled us on the field?  
And how did she, the wanton one,  
Give birth to a heroic son?  
A brother struck the monarch down,  
How, guilty, could he win renown?

Returning now with grief I sigh,  
As lightning cleaves the evening sky.  
No prayers to Heaven can avail,  
If our self-respect should fail.  
Pround kings are all on conquest bent;  
If they repent, I'll rest content.