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射訓狐 *Shooting the Screech-Owl*

The complete text — eleven couplets, twenty-two lines — with a working English beside it. The English is literal where the Chinese is odd and leaves the seams showing on purpose: it is a floor to translate from, not a finished rendering. Textual notes at the end record the readings adopted and the variants they were adopted against.

THE TEXT

有鳥夜飛名訓狐，矜兇挾狡誇自呼。
乘時陰黑止我屋，聲勢慷慨非常粗。
安然大喚誰畏忌，造作百怪非無須。
聚鬼征妖自朋扇，擺掉拱桷頽墜塗。
慈母抱兒怕入席，那暇更護雞窠雛。
我念乾坤德泰大，卵此惡物常勤劬。
縱之豈即遽有害，鬥柄行拄西南隅。
誰謂停奸計尤劇？意欲唐突羲和烏。
侵更歷漏氣彌厲，何由僥幸休須臾。
咨余往射豈得已，候女兩眼張睢盱。
梟驚墮梁蛇走竇，一夫斬頸群雛枯。

THE ENGLISH

There is a bird that flies by night, named the screech-owl; it plumes itself on ferocity, carries cunning under its wing, and boasts by crying its own name.

Taking its moment while the dark is black, it settles on my roof; its voice and bearing are vehement, and coarse beyond the common.

Calmly it cries out loud — whom does it fear or avoid? It works up a hundred prodigies, and there is purpose in it.

It gathers ghosts and levies goblins, fanning up a faction of its own; it shakes the bracket-arms and the rafters until the daub and plaster come down.

A tender mother clutches her child and is afraid to take her place at the mat; what leisure has she to guard the chicks in the coop as well?

I consider that the virtue of Heaven and Earth is vast in its greatness: it has hatched this evil creature too, and toiled diligently at it always.

To let it be — would that at once bring harm so quickly? The handle of the Dipper is moving round to prop the southwest corner.

Who would have said that harbouring a criminal makes the scheme worse still? Its intent is to affront the sun-crow of Xihe.

Encroaching through the night-watches and passing the marks of the water-clock, its breath grows ever fiercer; by what good luck should it desist even for a moment?

Alas, that I go out to shoot — how could it be otherwise? I wait for your two eyes to open wide and stare.

The owl, startled, drops from the beam; the snake bolts for its hole. One man cuts the neck through, and the whole brood withers.

TEXTUAL NOTES

- ★ 一夫斬頸 adopted, following 方's reading; other witnesses give 一矢 — one man cutting the neck through, or one arrow. The witnesses disagree and no evidence decides it. Noted, not resolved. (方 is cited by bare surname in the worksheets; almost certainly 方崧卿 of the 韓集舉正 — to be confirmed before print.)
- 停奸 is contestable; taken here as 停, to harbour or let stay, plus 奸, the criminal.
- 非無須 taken as 非無需, "not without need." Read literally as 須 the line says "not without whiskers," which some commentators defend as part of the physical portrait.
- 桷 is given as 角 in some witnesses.
- 鬥柄 printed as the worksheets have it. The standard graph for the Dipper is 斗.