The Scudamore Cipher

Richard J. Kennedy

Here is a man plowing his field, looking back upon his work. To plow the next row, he must turn his oxen and dig the next row adjacent to the first. This turn-about tour is called by the name 'Boustrophedon' which is the zig-zag route back and forth across the field. 'Bous' is taken from the Greek, which is 'Ox' and the rest is also Greek, taken from 'strephein', "to turn". Thus, the plowing goes back and forth on its boustrophedon track, "as the ox plows."

The ancient use of this zig-zag track was used in writing, where the first line of a poem, for example, is read left to right, and the next line is to be read right to left. "It was a common way of writing in stone in Ancient Greece" says Wikipedia, also giving examples of the trick in written texts.: See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boustrophedon

This turn-about tracking can be employed to cipher a message or a name into a piece of writing. Here's a short text that discovers a name in this ox- plowing of a text. The acrostic discovered spells out the name of **RICHARD**. The arrows indicate the path of our scanning. We would be looking for words (shown here in a larger font), the initial letters of which will spell out the ciphered name. The single rule otherwise is that the acrostic must begin on the first line and end on the last line.

Rather than a lashing whip, or iron prod should guide   >   R I

And turn your oxen, plowman, spare their hides,   <

Let gentle coaxing harmonize the beasts upon their track,   >   C H

Quote poesie as ye yoke the team, climb astride their backs,   <   A

Regale them with an earthy song, all oxen love a lay,   >   R

Such as the country maidens do, so plow them as ye may.   <   D

And so: **R**ather **I**ron **C**oaxing **H**armonize **A**stride **R**egale **D**o

The initial letters of these words spell out **RICHARD**, the name of the writer. There may be more than one selected initial letter on a line, or none. This is exactly how the cipher is played out in the poem to be presented. The method is neat, precise, takes no liberties, entertains no chance or random picking-about, and is true to all ciphering rules. The greater trick with this sort of cipher, is that in plowing back and forth on the lines, one must suspect what name is to be turned up in the furrowed text. More of this later.

The argument here is that this back and forth plowing through a text was employed in an Elizabethan poem which appeared in *A hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573), a collection of prose fiction and poems, naming no author. The poem, entitled "The Shield of Love",will hereafter be referred to as the 'Scudamore' cipher. The poem is prefaced by a note, informing us of the poet's ciphering intention. It reads: "**The absent lover (in ciphers) deciphering his name, doth crave some spedie relief as followeth**."

Of course the name of the person found out in the "Shield of Love" acrostic must be VALID. That is, it should make sense. In this case, the poet should be alive in 1573 -- some poet in the right place at the right time, with the access and acquaintance to get his poem included in this publication. So here we have it, a poem which, in its back and forth ox-plowing way, spells out the name of the poet, as he has promised. So let us harness up, buckle to, and plow the Scudamore.

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The Shield of Love

L'Escu d'amour, the shield of perfect love,   >   E D

The shield of loue, the force of stedfast faith,   <

The force of fayth which neuer will remoue,   >   W

But standeth fast, to byde the broonts of death: <

That trustie targe, hath long borne of the blowes,   >

And broke the thrusts, which absence at me throwes.   <   A

In doleful dayes I lead an absent life, >

And wound my will with many a weary thought: <

I plead for peace, yet sterue in storms of strife, >

I find debate, where quiet rest was sought. < R D

These pangs with mo, vnto my paine I proue, >

Yet beare I all vppon my shield of loue. <

In colder cares are my conceipts consumd, >

Than Dido felt when false Eneas fled: < D

In farre more heat, than trusty Troylus fumd, >

When craftie Cressyde dwelt with Diomed. <

My hope such frost, my hot desire such flame, >

That I both fryse, and smoulder in the same. <

So that I liue, and dye in one degree, >

Healed by hope and hurt againe with dread: <

Fast bound by fayth when fansie would be free, >

Vntied by trust, though thoughts enthrall my head, < E V

Reuiued by joyes, when hope doth most abound, >

And yet with grief, in depths of dollors drownd. <

In these assaultes I feele my feebled force, >

Begins to faint, thus weried still in woes: <

And scarcely can my thus consumed corse, >

Hold vp this Buckler to beare of these blowes <

So that I craue, or presence for relief, >

Or some supplie, to ease mine absent grief. < E

Lenuoie

To you (deare Dame) this doleful plaint I make, >

Whose onely sight may some redresse my smart: < R

Then show your selfe, and for your seruantes sake, >

Make hast post hast, to helpe a faythfull harte.   <

Mine owne poore shield hath me defended long,   >

Now lend me yours, for elles you do me wrong.   <   E

Meritum petere, graue. (To seek reward is a serious matter)

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And so: **E**scu **D**'amore **W**hich **A**bsence **R**est **D**ebate

Dido **E**nthrall **V**ntried **E**ase **R**edress **E**lles

The solution, then, as our plowman poet promised to tell us, is **EDWARD DE VERE**, played out in this unusual cipher. It may have been the fancy of the poet to employ this ox-plowing cipher because of his title, the **Earl of Oxford**. However that might be, the design of the cipher is without fault. And although the identity of our twenty-three year old poet was secretly held, he allowed us, in the Scudamore poem, a peek at his shrouded vanity.

If one is keen upon this acrostic foolery, the poem may be scanned backwards with the same result, again spelling out **EDWARD DE VERE**, beginning on the last line and ending on the first line, turning up different words, but yielding again the name of the poet in this twice plowed field.

Elles **D**efended **W**hose **A**bsence **R**elief **D**rownd

Dollors **E**nthrall **V**ntied **E**neas **R**est **E**scu

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NOTES

The Scudamore poem has been subject to this finical scrutiny since 1926, when B.M. Ward first suggested the acrostic displaying the name of Edward de Vere in this boustrophedon trek across the text. The Shakespearean/ Stratfordian scholar, Sir Walter Greg, commented that "We are expressly told that the name is concealed, and the acrostic found is an excellent one," and that he would be "reluctant to believe that it could be due to chance"

Sir John Scudamore is associated with the poem, as the Scudamore family motto is *E'scu D'amour* which would translate well to be a "Shield of Love", the title of the poem. But the likeness of the words *E'scu D'amour* and Scudamore would hardly be called a cipher,

such as the poet announces, nor hardly even an anagram, but is practically a straight-on copy of the motto and family name. (Scudamour = Scudamore).At best, the likeness could achieve the status of a pun, it is certainly no cipher.

In their excellent book, *The Shakespeare Ciphers Examined*, William and Elizebeth Friedman (Cambridge, 1958) made trial of the Scudamore cipher to find an alternate to the Edward de Vere solution. They turned up the name of Lewis Carroll to satisfy the ox-plowing rule, but which identity is not VALID of course, the Rev. Dodgson arriving at the field several centuries too late.

So there we have it. The field of the Scudamore cipher has been much trod upon, the debunkers seeking some other husbandry at work to exclude Edward de Vere. Yet he is suspected to be the chief writer of a *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*. No other VALID name has been turned up in the Scudamore poem, although the plowshare has been hauled over the ground by several asses.

<p style="text-align:center">End   Richard J. Kennedy Oct.,2011</p>