THE TITANIA ACROSTIC REVISITED

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In the August 1985 issue of Word Ways, the editor noted that the words in Act III, Scene I of "A Midsummer-Night's Dream" which Titania speaks, acrostically form the word T I T An I A which is her name. Arguing that these letters are statistically unlikely to have appeared by accident, he asserted that this is evidence that Shakespeare intentionally arranged the acrostic.

Stronger evidence lies in the very context of the scene. Titania was previously put to sleep by Oberon, and placed under a spell with the words "What thou seest, when thou dost wake, Do it for they true-love take." The whole scenario is a joke being played on Titania by her fellow fairies, so that when she awakens, she will no longer have a superior-being's power; rather she will be reduced to the power of a mere earthling by "falling in love" (in this instance, with Bottom, a character who is the first "thing" she sees when she awakens, and who is dressed like an ass).

All the while, Shakespeare is secretly commenting on this, using an acrostic to let the reader know that Titania is making an ass of herself. He does this, not only with the one word "Titania," but with *two* words—one being in the form of an exclamation that confers the idea "Titania, how could you do this to yourself?" The previous line to the lines that contain the acrostic—which is also spoken by Titania—is the real beginning of the paragraph, and the beginning of her reply to Bottom as well "Out of this wood I do not desire to go." Notice that the first letter of that line is "O"; the word "O" in Shakespeare's time was used for today's exclamatory word "Oh!" Thus, the full acrostic reads "O, Titania!"

Shakespeare employed acrostics in another play. In "The Comedy of Errors," Act I, Scene I, there appears the acrostic "Want my baby" with quite an unusual form. The first word reads backwards (upwards) from, and is just above a central line that contains the second word ("My soul should sue as advocate for thee"); the third word reads forwards (downwards) from, and is just below the central line. Aegeon, looking all over the world for his lost son (baby), wanders to this kingdom and is condemned to die. Before his death, he has the above interchange with the Duke, who sympathized with him, but cannot pardon him. In the very lines that the Duke is offering him sympathy, Shakespeare is acrostically describing Aegeon's greatest desire—he wants his long-lost baby son!

Acrostics are predictable, using several inventive principles initially assembled by a small group of investigators in the former USSR beginning in the 1960s. In fact, many other wordplay techniques are predictable by using these principles.

A problem encountered in verifying a writer's knowledge of word forms or wordplay that appear in his writings is "Could this have occurred just by chance?" One important answer to this is "Not if the word play fits into the context of what is being said." This requires, however, that the word-form investigator be aware of the context—actually *read* the writing, or be familiar with the writing. Unfortunately, wordplay investigators or numerologists are chiefly looking for immediate results, and are unaware that the context is an important contributing element to the solution of such problems.