

QUESTION 57

What does Stephen Fry think about the authorship issue?

Stephen Fry

Well, I suppose it would be rude to point out that the man who came up with the Oxfordian theory was called Looney, and I don't wish to be mean against those who try hard to push the case for Oxford but it's an uphill battle. I thought Caroline Spurgeon settled this in 1935 with her master work *Shakespeare's Imagery*. There seems to be absolutely no doubt to anybody who reads Shakespeare, and is familiar with the text, that these are the works of a countryman. This is a man who knows about kites and fields and it's certainly not the work of an aristocrat. It just doesn't ring true in any sense. I don't see that I have any particular party pre-reason why I should believe that it was Shakespeare of Stratford who was the 'onlie begetter' of those plays and sonnets, but the onus is surely on the Oxfordians. It's an extraordinary idea that human beings then as now have the competence to hide such an extraordinary and ridiculous conspiracy. Why? Why do it? I mean, all right, everybody seems to know how aristocrats behaved in the 1580s and 90s and apparently they weren't allowed to write poetry, and Sidney's poetry was published after his death, but actually, I mean, come along, I just do not believe that the Earl of Oxford sat down in all that labour and wrote those plays and allowed the name and credit to go to someone else. The rest is circumstantial drivel I mean look at what Ben Jonson wrote about him, look at those words of the 'native woodnotes wild' the fact that they were seven years after his death doesn't seem to me to make them any less true it just makes Ben Jonson a greater and colder liar. Why would he wish to lie about a man he barely knew, this man Oxford, in order to big up Shakespeare? It's nothing about it seems to me to smell of anything other than people who like burying away at conspiracy theories, and conspiracy theories throughout history have always been trumped by cock-up theories. No one has ever managed successfully to conspire, so far as I know, in the history of our planet, because they're all hopeless, because they're all the kind of people we went to school with who make elementary errors and are foolish. But there is a voice that comes out of the canon of Shakespeare that is absolutely unmistakable. I see it reproduced nowhere in the poems of

de Vere, nowhere, not even a hint, in fact de Vere was the kind of poet Shakespeare managed very, very well managed to parody . It's such a pity, such a pity , that people get waylaid into somehow that thinking - it's like these people who believe the pyramids were built by aliens because mankind isn't capable of achieving something so great without, without - what? Without the education of de Vere? De Vere wasn't a particularly well educated man anyway, and the Bacon theory, and any other theory, has behind it the working of a supreme and extraordinary mind. But there is no evidence that de Vere had a particularly remarkable mind at all, despite his name he didn't have his education at Oxford. I just cannot see it, I look and I look with the eyes I hope of a believer, and all I just see is the petty little matchings of dates and scratchings of 'oh, look he went to Pomona or he went to Padua and Shakespeare never went to Padua'. Well, for heaven's sake, Shakespeare never went to Bermuda; he never went to Athens. I mean as far as we know he never went to Elsinore, nor indeed as far as we know did Kyd or de Vere or anyone else who claims to have written various kinds of *Hamlet*. I've gone on too long because I'm too cross and I find it all too silly. Just look at the plays and hear the voice, the single human voice which comes out in many colours and characters, but is unquestionably a voice that has to be given the name and the only name I've seen that fits it is William Shakespeare, the Stratfordian, the poacher of Arden, and yes many of the silly little rumours, the folklore that went round about his childhood, very much after the fact. But he is our only Shakescene, and Richard Greene's envy seems to be the proof much more for Shakespeare's existence than of Shakespeare 's ability to be a copycat. Long live the Swan of Avon. Long live the Bard of Avon. Thank you all for listening.