

## QUESTION 54

What is the attitude of mainstream Shakespeare scholars towards the authorship discussion?

Peter Holland

For a long time, Shakespeare scholars ignored the authorship controversy, treating it as a bizarre, marginal phenomenon. After all, the proponents of other candidates do not develop their arguments according to the standards of humanist scholarship developed in many, many fields of academic study (history, attribution studies, biography, textual analysis and so on). Discussing the details of their case with anti-Stratfordians was and continues to be frustrating for mainstream scholars, because the kinds of evidence the ‘other side’ adduces – hypothesis piled on speculation built on conspiracy theories and secret codes – cannot be met with logical argument, any more than the conviction many have that, say, humans have never landed on the moon.

But those of us intrigued by the ways in which popular beliefs develop (Elvis lives, Barack Obama was not born in the USA, and so on) are fascinated by why it should be that some people might think that Shakespeare couldn’t have written Shakespeare. The strange passion that drives these theories is a powerful fact about our society’s need to believe.