

**Interview with Leo Daugherty  
interviewed by Gary Goldstein**

**Q:** What led you to believe there were relevant archival materials—letters, diaries, memos, etc.—not yet discovered by scholars that would resolve the mystery of Ferdinando Stanley’s death?

**A:** I did not know that sufficient archival materials would exist to resolve the mystery. What I knew, from the cursory research I’d done up till about 10 years ago, was that the surface had hardly been scratched. Nobody had researched, in connection with Ferdinando Stanley, such major Catholic Lancashire players as the Bold brothers, their brother-in-law Williamson (chief aide to Lord and Lady Shrewsbury, also players), and the Doughtie brothers. For example, it was often repeated by scholars that a man named Doughtie had fled Lathom Castle (where Stanley lived and died) on the night of his death, stealing a horse and riding away into the night. The authorities in London had pursued him. Then the researchers all said words like “There the records of Doughtie end.” I doubted if they really did end there. I wondered if I could find Doughtie. After some work, and a little luck, I found that he had fled to Spain, had been put on the payroll of the English Catholic leadership there, and that his brother had been a gentleman waiter at Lathom for years — serving food daily to the earl. This led to the discovery that Richard Bold’s brother, Henry Bold, had served as a gentleman waiter right alongside Doughtie.

Similarly, scholars had known for years that Ferdinando’s father Henry (fourth earl) had taken as his second wife (common law) a woman named Jane/Joan Halsall. He and his first wife divorced not too long after Ferdinando’s birth, and he soon married Jane/Joan. They remained together until Henry’s death. But no one had figured out that this same woman was Richard Hesketh’s mother by a previous marriage of her *own*. I had long suspected this, but had to do a good bit of genealogical research to prove it. By Jane/Joan, Henry bore four more children, one of whom was Dame Ursula Stanley, who married Sir John Salisbury of Lleweni; I think he is the most likely “Turtle” of Shakespeare’s enigmatic masterpiece “The Phoenix and the Turtle.” This discovery showed that the man who had brought the treasonous crown offer to Ferdinando (i.e., Hesketh) was his virtual brother, as Jane/

Joan was of course Ferdinando's stepmother and had been since his boyhood. This meant that Hesketh would have immediate access to Henry and/or Ferdinando when he brought the crown offer from the Catholic leadership abroad. Similarly, no one had focused on the acrimonious Ferdinando/Essex correspondence of early 1594 — the sole subject of which was Richard Bold — in connection with Ferdinando's death.

**Q:** To what extent did scientific inquiry and expertise play a role in your investigation? Did you have to consult with toxicologists or forensic experts to conduct a proper examination of some aspects of the evidence?

**A:** I did this second-hand, using the fairly recent toxicological studies of Ferdinando's death reported in two medical journals — *Hepatology* and *The Lancet* — and the follow-up correspondence in those journals. Previous to these publications, Ian Wilson had interviewed several specialists in preparing his book *Shakespeare: The Evidence* (c. 1991), and these physicians had likewise decided for arsenic, probably in one or two massive doses.

**Q:** How did your investigation proceed?

**A:** Slowly. It started back in the early 1990s with my strong interest in Ferdinando's younger brother William, who became sixth earl in April of 1594 upon Ferdinando's death. William is a fascinating character in his own right, actually more interesting than even Ferdinando, and I ended in writing up the narrative of his life for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004). I subsequently wrote a small book about some connections between William Stanley and William Shakespeare, centering upon the young poet Richard Barnfield, for whom Stanley had been an important patron. I became interested in the fact that this was an amazingly under-researched noble family, particularly as Henry, Ferdinando, and William had been such prominent patrons of poets, players, and playhouses. I was intrigued by the early researches of Christopher Devlin and Charles Nicholl into Ferdinando's death. It seemed a fascinating, mysterious puzzle. So I began trying to figure it out. I did the work mostly for fun, as historical research is what I like to do best.

My main interest as a Shakespeare teacher of many years' standing is the political and intellectual background of the plays and nondramatic poems. And here was background galore — unexplored background for Shakespeare, and on the man who, at the time of his death, was the leading contender to the throne.

**Q:** At what point in your research did you have enough information to draw a comprehensive diagram of players, motives, and actions?

**A:** I started trying to create one early on, just to bring order out of chaos, but I didn't have a "comprehensive" diagram until about two years ago. This is because I was slow in connecting some of the more obscure key players to the murder.

**Q:** To what extent did creative insight play a role in your research? After all, it took 400 years before an American professor solved a mystery that impacted the succession to the English crown.

**A:** I think very little. I think the largest role was played by intellectual curiosity, a love of historical research, a love of evidence, and a love of trying to construct reliable narratives from evidence. I think “creative insight” sometimes leads to turning wishful thinking into conclusion — particularly among researchers who value it more than they value disinterested seeking. For myself, I find that following the evidence wherever it leads is more fun — even if, as is usually the case, it leads nowhere. I am a fan of disinterestedness, and I regret the seeming fact that so many in the arts and humanities today don’t share my enthusiasm. I note at the same time that absolute disinterestedness — absolute “objectivity” — is an impossible dream for humans, no matter how idealistic they may be in trying to achieve it in their work. Because we are human, we are inescapably “interested” — or, to use Donna Haraway’s word, “guilty.”

**Q:** To what extent were the Stanley and Cecil descendants helpful in your investigation — did they provide access to private archives?

**A:** Their curators were most helpful — and most generous. I did not speak with any of the actual descendants.

**Q:** How does your investigation change the way the English succession should be viewed?

**A:** I’m not sure it changes anything very important about how historians think about succession. In one way, I guess I wish it would, as I myself believe that succession is usually the main answer to most questions about what was “really going on” in advanced monarchical societies. Most historians know this — perhaps especially historians of Elizabethan England — but they fear appearing unfashionably “reductionist” in making succession the “be-all and end-all.”

My own researches lead me to believe that one can hardly be reductionist *enough* when it comes to the importance of succession in such societies. For example, from all I can tell, the major political players in Elizabethan England (and even the general populace) always had it on their minds. It was always there. Most questions led to it, and most fears sprang from it — from the fear of societal disorder, if not indeed of actual chaos. A recent historical joke has Lord Burghley working at his desk in the early 1590s when some high-up colleagues rush in to inform him that a giant saucer-shaped vehicle has just flown in from on high, that it has landed in London, and that hordes of small purple creatures are rushing out of it and onto the streets. Burghley’s first question: “How might this impact the succession?”

**Q:** The Catholics in exile on the continent had a powerful desire to get revenge for Fernando's betrayal of Hesketh to the Queen and Lord Burghley. They also had more than four full months to think about how to do that after Hesketh was executed in late November. Robert Parsons in the second edition of his work, *A Conference on the Next Succession to the Crowne of England*, all but signaled to Ferdinando and to the royal court in London that his days were numbered. In contrast, the local quasi-Catholics like Bold did not have anywhere the same amount of time to plan an assassination, actually only a few days after Fernando overreached by going after them. Should we categorically rule out that the Catholics in exile had nothing to do with the murder of Fernando?

**A:** Oh, no, I wouldn't rule them out. But the Jesuit leadership on the continent was thinly manned, underfunded, and highly pragmatic. I doubt that revenge would have motivated them much. In regards to Bold, the Doughties, et alia, my inference, as I say in the book, is that the plan had been in the works for quite a while and was the "real" topic of the Essex/Ferdinando correspondence. I believe on the evidence that Essex wanted to re-plant Bold inside Lathom, and Ferdinando didn't want that, and Ferdinando told both Essex and Gilbert Talbot (earl of Shrewsbury) that Bold had plotted for his life a while earlier — in revenge for Ferdinando's having hassled the mother-in-law of Bold and Williamson, Agnes Mordant, for her recusancy. I also infer that the plan was not ready to be unleashed at the time Ferdinando busted Bold and his cohorts at Bold Hall in early April of 1594, but the fact that he did bust them all was a "trigger" for the assassination. I go into all that in my book.

Also, re *Conference on the Succession*: the Jesuits kept rapidly revising it in response to deathly events up in Lancashire. Most scholars know only that they seemed to settle on Ferdinando as their preferred successor, but they actually got out another fast edition after Ferdinando's death and came out for William. William, however, was not a viable candidate. But some tiny bits of evidence do suggest that William may have tried to get possession of Ferdinando's three daughters in the days immediately following his death. If so, he or people advising him may have wanted to get control of the eldest, who was next in line for the throne after Ferdinando, by some people's reckoning.

**Q:** Do you accept the interpretation that Lord Burghley acted quickly after Stanley's assassination to save the Tudor regime from further plots, especially by Catholics, by marrying the obvious heir apparent to the English throne (William Stanley) to his own granddaughter, Elizabeth de Vere?

**A:** No, I can't see that that would have been very useful to Burghley. William wasn't a viable candidate after Ferdinando's death because Ferdinando's eldest daughter was ahead of him in the bloodline. William was also a very eccentric young man who mainly travelled the world and wrote plays for his own theater company to perform, mostly in the provinces but also in London shortly before Elizabeth actually died. I think Burghley's motive with the marriage was to put this powerful earldom

under his own thumb, not trusting William to administer it well because of his sketchy background. It turned out that Elizabeth (Vere Stanley) did do most of the governing, but it isn't known how much she deferred to Burghley for advice and guidance (or perhaps rule). She was a powerful woman, and a woman of her own mind. Burghley's main fear about the earldom of Derby after Ferdinando's death was that it might become a powerful rogue faction, acting with other such factions (e.g., the Shrewsburys) to bring on a new War of the Roses. This was what the Cecils most feared — after their succession fears.

To answer your question more directly, I can't see how marrying Elizabeth to William could possibly, in Burghley's mind (or in anyone's), have "saved the Tudor regime from further plots, especially by Catholics." Besides, Burghley, whose spy system was very good, knew among other things that William, like his father Henry, was far more tolerant of the Catholics than Ferdinando had been. The fiercely anti-Catholic Ferdinando would have been, in fact, Burghley's best bet in terms of any possible issue here.

**Q:** Do you think that Burghley's decision to arrange this marriage quickly was an astute action to signal the Earl of Essex that he was not needed as a kingmaker?

**A:** Oh, Essex already knew very well that the Cecils wanted him out of the kingmaker business with all their hearts. They made no secret of that, and Essex needed no more signals on that score. The Cecils and Essex were deeply rivalrous about the succession, as they were about almost everything else in Elizabeth's England of the 1590s.

**Q:** Are the tombs of the Fifth and Sixth Earls of Derby (Fernando and William Stanley) located in the vault associated with the Derby Chapel at the Parish Church of Ormskirk of Saints Peter and Paul near Liverpool? Are these tombs accessible, have you seen them, and what materials are used – e.g., are they made of marble?

**A:** There seems to be much interest in this matter, judging from other people's recent correspondence with me as well as your own. Yes, they are buried at Ormskirk, although I'm not sure that William was originally buried there. I don't know if they're accessible, but I assume so. I have no idea what they're made of. Tell me why you (and others) want to know about this. I have been mainly asked about it by Oxfordians.

**Q:** How do the results of your research affect the way we look at Shakespeare the dramatist?

**A:** It demonstrates (along with the recent researches of other people, such as Lawrence Manley and Catherine Canino) how willing Shakespeare was to bend history in order to flatter his patrons – particularly his Stanley patrons in his early days as a dramatist. As I note in the book, one sees this primarily in *Richard III* and

in the three *Henry VI* plays. It shocks some people today, even some good scholars, to think that the “artist” Shakespeare would “do such a thing.” But do it he did. And why not? To Shakespeare, his plays were not really his art. His art was in *Venus and Adonis*, *Phoenix and Turtle*, and *Sonnets* – but most particularly in what he probably viewed as his major “literary” or “artistic” creation of all – *Lucrece* (1594), which, ironically, is one of his least-favored and least-read works today. When it came to pleasing his audience – especially its most noble and influential members – he did whatever it took. In regards to the one known occasion when he didn’t – e.g., in *Macbeth* and its negative effect upon the new King James – I think we have a fascinating problem, so anomalous is this meeting of playwright, play, and supremely noble audience member.

**Q:** Do you think your investigation will have an impact on the epistemology of historical research? For example, the current propensity to speculate about psychology, motive, and so on based on the plots and characters of literature of the Elizabethan period, especially drama produced in an age of censorship that uses allegory as a means of communicating about public affairs?

**A:** No, not regarding public plays. I don’t use any such evidence in my book, and I don’t believe in its usefulness. I think that scholars such as Peter Milward and Claire Asquith and Richard Wilson go far afield in their attempts to build arguments and conclusions therefrom. On the other hand, I believe that the study of topical allusion or historical representation gets a very unfair rap today in connection with nondramatic poetry, particularly pastoral. Pastoral seems especially important to me, as the Elizabethan poets mainly *wrote* it to shadow real contemporary people and their doings, and those scholars today who disallow such approaches to pastoral – again, just a question of academic fashion and the ideologies stemming therefrom – are leading us down a dead-end path. When, for example, Jonathan Bateman recently said that he thinks people should not want to know the real-world identities of Shakespeare’s beloved male addressee, rival poet, and fair youth, it can all sound neo-art-for-art’s-sake in a supposedly high-minded way, or even a tres-hip way, but what is such a belief, really, other than disguised anti-historicism in particular – and anti-intellectualism in general? Insofar as *Sonnets* is pastoral (which it manifestly is, at least in part), it should certainly be studied for topicality if critics and scholars wish to do so – and valued when such work is done well, rather than disallowed out of hand. But with plays it is different, and the idea that Shakespeare was sending “secret coded messages of hope” to Catholics in his public theater audiences, by way of his characters and what they say, is, to say the least, highly unlikely.

**Q:** What is your take on the current Shakespeare Wars?

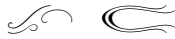
**A:** I think the “Shakespeare Wars” – as Ron Rosenbaum called them in his recent book of that title – are decidedly unhelpful to research. The main reason I say this is that most of the “warfare” emanates from scholars and critics deeply entrenched



in ideology far more than in commitment to good evidence, and good sense, on almost all sides. Example: “Shakespeare the Catholic.” Several readers of my book are Catholic scholars, some of them Jesuits, who are friends of mine. They know that for 25 years or more I have publicly agreed with them. Why? Because almost all the good evidence points to a Shakespeare with a strong “old faith” background in Warwickshire – family, friends, and connections– and that his continuing connection to Catholicism is well-documented. Also, almost no good evidence points in any other direction. Peter Milward, S.J., has published the best and most useful roundups of this evidence.

These readers are so deeply committed to “Shakespeare the Catholic,” and at the same time so deeply committed to Catholicism itself, that they become upset when scholars say anything remotely critical of the Elizabethan Catholic church – and the exiled Catholic leadership abroad. They deny, for example, that the leadership sent Hesketh to Ferdinando with Archduke Ernest’s (and almost certainly the pope’s) blessing), and that Lancashire Catholics killed Ferdinando for religious reasons. They think the pope’s deposition order against Elizabeth in 1570 – amounting to a hit order – should not be taken seriously. They think that the entire sixteenth-century Catholic leadership, in England and on the continent, some among its number now canonized, is made up of heroic saintly, figures. But, because of their psychological manicheism, they also believe that the leaders of Elizabeth’s government were Satanic Machiavellians. Thus, when I try in the first half of the book to give the disinterested facts about the Elizabethan Catholic leadership, these friends respond with tunnel-vision shock, saying in effect, “But I thought you were one of *us*.” Two of them deny my finding that Ferdinando was himself anti-Catholic – out of deeply committed wish for a Catholic Ferdinando rather than out of any consideration for the documentary evidence I discovered about his passionate support for the Reformation in England – and hatred of the Counter-Reformation efforts there.

They were also upset by my dissing of some of the bad Catholic scholarship on Ferdinando’s death during the past fifty years. Most noticeable to me is that these friends, all good and reputable scholars, responded to my book with long letters which mentioned *nothing but* its picture of Elizabethan Catholicism. They mentioned nothing else! – whereas the non-Catholic scholars didn’t mention the Catholic material at all in their responses. I find this discouraging because of my longstanding belief, stemming originally from my interest in the history of scientific inquiry, that no pre-existing ideology—including religious ideology—should be allowed to influence, in any way, one’s evidence-based intellectual work. Such pre-existing ideology cannot help but blind, or at least put blinkers, on people who attempt such work. Yes, we are still devoted friends, these Catholic scholars and I, and I think we always will be. But the main thing I have learned so far from publishing this book is the powerful *extent* to which ideological commitment adversely influences intellectual conclusions.



**Leo Daugherty** holds a BA in Fine Arts, an MA in English Literature, and a PhD in American Literature. He also did postdoctoral study in Linguistics, studying syntax with Noam Chomsky at MIT. For more than ten years, he has taught Shakespeare and other courses in the humanities in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies program at the University of Virginia. He is also Professor Emeritus of Literature and linguistics at the Evergreen State College, where he taught for over 25 years. In addition to *The Assassination of Shakespeare's Patron*, he is also author of *William Shakespeare, Richard Barnfield, and the Sixth Earl of Derby* (2010), editor of Robert Greene's *Greene's Funeralls* and *Orpheus his Journey to Hell: A Modernized Edition*, and the author of critical essays on writers as diverse as Shakespeare, Cormac McCarthy, and Allen Ginsberg.