

Since Langbaine had at this place declared against the extreme lack-Latin tradition, Gildon does so too, in some respects echoing Langbaine. Gildon then passes on to describe Shakspeare's tomb and the Stratford church. Gildon's statement is thus likely due to his patterning upon Langbaine rather than to his subconscious desire to refute Castle's run-away story. Because of Gildon's known prejudice here, however, we may be certain that if he went to Stratford, he is no more likely than Hall to have elicited this story from Castle. Castle would hardly try that one on even moderately skeptical people.⁹⁷

We must recognize the certain fact that William Castle, sexton of Stratford-on-Avon, was for long an official biographer of Shakspeare. Inevitably, visitors to the shrine at Stratford church received their information from him. So far, only Aubrey, characteristically, be-thought himself to get the gossip of "the neighbors," and all that he discovered was the diamond in the rough from which one of William Castle's jewels was later cut. We must remember also that the Stratford authorities employed a sexton, who by force of circumstances became one of Shakspeare's first known official biographers—probably the first. It was neither their fault nor William Castle's fault that the latter was typical of his class, which Hall with his eye on Castle describes as "for y^e most part a very [i]gnorant sort of people," an opinion in which Shakspeare himself evidently concurred. But it will be most grievously our fault if we do not recognize the limitations of William Castle as a biographer, as also the personal equations of those who report his stories. His stories are the merest myths, and become steadily more mythical with retelling, as is customary with gossip wholly uncontrolled.

If Betterton or another did between 1661 and 1708 make inquiries at Stratford church which were embodied by Rowe in his life of Shakspeare in 1709—and someone certainly did consult the registers—, it would most likely be some form of this tradition which he would receive, though after 1698 he presumably would not have found William Castle there to tell his stories. But if Betterton's informant did receive either of Castle's stories, it was clearly rejected. For, as we shall see, Shakspeare's father is in Rowe's story not a butcher, but a dealer in wool, for which we now have some contemporary confirmation. But Shakspeare still assists his father in his busi-

⁹⁷ For the metamorphosis of the butcher story into the deer-stealing story, see Appendix I.