

this period 1688-1700 all that Bowman and Betterton knew about Falstaff's Stratford connections is given in this story attributed to Sir William Bishop. Though Bowman is said by Oldys to have cast doubts on such a journey, yet Rowe says of Betterton,

I must own a particular Obligation to him, for the most considerable part of the Passages relating to his Life, which I have here transmitted to the Publick; his Veneration for the Memory of *Shakespear* having engag'd him to make a Journey into *Warwickshire*, on purpose to gather up what Remains he could of a Name for which he had so great a Value.<sup>5</sup>

Someone certainly gathered information in Warwickshire for Rowe's life of Shakspeare, and Rowe says it was Betterton. Oldys also tells us that the Falstaff story is a tradition from Betterton, but the setting of his statement shows that he is here epitomizing Rowe. For our present purposes, however, it makes little difference who went to Warwickshire for Rowe. Malone sets the date of this alleged journey of Betterton's into Warwickshire as 1708,<sup>6</sup> on what grounds other than inference does not appear. At least, Betterton is alleged to have procured at some time before 1709 further information concerning Sir John Falstaff's prototype at Stratford, about whom Bowman, and so presumably Betterton, had a hint apparently by 1700.

And it is a grand story which Rowe tells of young Shakspeare from Betterton. It runs,

In this kind of Settlement [as a family man] he continu'd for some time, 'till an Extravagance that he was guilty of, forc'd him both out of his Country and that way of Living which he had taken up; and tho' it seem'd at first to be a Blemish upon his good Manners, and a Misfortune to him, yet it afterwards happily prov'd the occasion of exerting one of the greatest *Genius's* that ever was known in Dramatick Poetry. He had, by a Misfortune common enough to young Fellows, fallen into ill Company; and amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of Deer-stealing, engag'd him with them more than once in robbing a Park that belong'd to Sir *Thomas Lucy* of *Cherlecot*, near *Stratford*. For this he was prosecuted by that Gentleman, as he thought, somewhat too severely; and in order to revenge that ill Usage, he made a Ballad upon him. And tho' this, probably the first Essay of his Poetry, he lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter, that it redoubled the Prosecution against him to that degree, that he was oblig'd to leave his Business and Family in *Warwickshire*, for some time, and shelter himself in *London*.

It is at this Time, and upon this Accident, that he is said to have made his first Acquaintance in the Play-house, etc.<sup>7</sup>

*Falstaff* is allow'd by every body to be a Master-piece, . . . Amongst other Extravagances, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he has made him a Dear-stealer, that he might at the same time remember his *Warwickshire* Prosecutor, under the Name of Justice *Shallow*; he has given him very near the same Coat of Arms which *Dugdale*, in his *Antiquities* of that County, describes for a Family there, and makes the *Welsh* Parson descant very pleasantly upon 'em.<sup>8</sup>

Now what was the story which Betterton picked up from Warwickshire, and how much of Rowe's story is inference? Fortunately, Anthony à Wood's circle furnishes us the answer. It will be remembered that Aubrey, gathering notes for Wood, gave us the Stratford version by or before 1681 of Shakspeare's coming to London, at which time Shakspeare had not yet started running away, though he had begun by 1693. Now William Fulman had made a collection of materials which passed after his death on June 28, 1688, to Richard Davies. Wood complains in his *Athenae* of 1691-92 that he

<sup>5</sup> Rowe, *Shakespear*, Vol. I, p. XXXIV.

<sup>7</sup> Rowe, *Shakespear*, Vol. I, pp. V-VI.

<sup>6</sup> Malone, *Variorum* (1821), Vol. II, p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> Rowe, *Shakespear*, Vol. I, pp. XVII-XVIII.