

If so, there is nothing in Falstaff's acts to recall those of this townsman;<sup>19</sup> but the story would set Betterton and others looking for Sir John Falstaff's prototype at Stratford. If a Stratfordian began reading *Merry Wives* to attempt to decipher the caricature of his ancient fellow-townsman, he would inevitably find a satire upon the Lucy family in the luces of Justice Shallow. As a knight near Stratford, Sir Thomas would be the satirized prototype of Falstaff, who had occasioned this search. He would also be Falstaff's opponent, Justice Shallow with the dozen white luces, since Sir Thomas actually had three luces in his coat of arms. So the earlier run-away tradition at Stratford and the Falstaff story of Bishop would become the Lucy story of Davies and Betterton under the influence of *Merry Wives of Windsor*. A significant detail is that Falstaff in stealing the deer had broken Slender's head, and that worthy now has "matter in my head against you; and against your cony-catching rascals, Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol."<sup>20</sup> In both the account of Davies and that in *Merry Wives* both venison and rabbits are involved. Of course, Bardolph and his crew are really cony-catchers in another sense, as we learn several lines further down, but on the face of these lines Falstaff has taken venison and his men have caught conies. Since the Lucy family now had both deer and rabbits, the interpretation was in a way inevitable. At any rate, Davies clearly has the original form of the story, and the Betterton-Rowe story has clearly been polished up from it, by omitting the rabbits and making the whole thing a genteel deer-stealing performance. Betterton and Rowe have trimmed to the actual *Merry Wives* version.

The evolution of the story is now clear. Stratford had by 1681 a story that Shakspeare had been a butcher, which had become by 1693 a tradition that Shakspeare ran away to London and made his fortune as an actor and dramatist. It had also by 1700 a story that Sir John Falstaff was a caricature of one of Shakspeare's fellow townsmen. In examining the Falstaff plays to discover the satirized person, Stratfordians noted the satirized Justice Shallow of *Merry Wives* and his dozen luces. So the satirized prototype of Sir John Falstaff is inevitably swallowed up in the satirized Sir Thomas Lucy. From the *Merry Wives* it appears that Falstaff and his attendants stole venison and rabbits from Justice Shallow, who threatens to bring Sir John before the star chamber. Since the Stratford tradition had it that Shakspeare ran away to London, the riddle was now solved. Shakspeare had stolen Sir Thomas Lucy's venison and rabbits, and Sir Thomas had used personal violence and the law to force Shakspeare out of the country into a fortune at London. Why Shakspeare chose to run to the star chamber and why Sir Thomas did not pursue him there as he had threatened is not explained. Davies tells the resultant story as he had picked it up probably at Stratford while he was connected with Coventry 1703-08, and it is almost exactly this story which Rowe corrects and embellishes in 1709, supposedly from Betterton's gathering.

Betterton or Rowe or both of them then dressed the story up. The inci-

<sup>19</sup> The townsman is likely to be John Combe, and this an echo of the bitter-epitaph tradition. The bitter-ballad is likely to have been begotten by the bitter-epitaph.

<sup>20</sup> *Merry Wives*, I, 1, 127-129.