NOTE
THE NOMENCLATURE OF KING LEAR

Without disturbing the traditional picture of the sources of King Lear, it may still be possible to add a detail or two. We may, for instance, ask why in the Gloster sub-plot the two chief characters, Edgar and Edmund, and also the steward Oswald, should have Anglo-Saxon names, while all the characters in the main plot have British names derived ultimately from Geoffrey of Monmouth. The acknowledged source of the sub-plot, the Arcadia, is no help, since the brothers there have the romance names of Leonatus and Plexirtus. I wish to suggest that these names were taken, because of their etymological significance, from Camden's Remaines, entered in the Stationers' Register on 10 November 1604 and published in 1605. This book was suggested as a secondary source of the Lear story (as of the belly fable in Coriolanus), and as the origin of the Fool's jest about a shelled peascod many years ago;¹ but it may repay a little more examination. In Camden's glossary of Saxon names we find (p. 65): 'osvold, Ger. House-ruler or Steward: for Wold in old English and high Dutch, is a Ruler . . .'. Where else should Shakespeare have learnt that Oswald meant 'steward'? Just conceivably, if we are liberal in our dating, from Verstegan's (or Rowlands's) Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities, published at Antwerp in 1605, which glosses Oswald in much the same way as Camden—a ruler or menager of the affairs of the hobs' (p. 266)—though without using the word 'steward'. But the object of Verstegan's book was precisely to disentangle the confusion between British and Saxon antiquity which was common in the age and which is typically exhibited by King Lear itself.² Shakespeare is therefore the less likely to have read it. What of the other names? Camden glosses 'Edgar' as follows (p. 50):

EADGAR, Sax. for Eadig-ar, Happy, or blessed honor, or power, for I find it interpreted in an old history Folaix potestas . . . and Eadig, (for the which Ead was vsed in composition,) is the word in the 6. of saint Math. in the English-Saxon testament, so often iterated, for Blessed in the Beatitudes. . . . Ear, or Ar, signifie(s) Honor. . . .

¹ See W. Perrett, The Story of King Lear from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Shakespeare (Palaestra, xxv, 1904), p. 121 ff.: K. Muir, in the Arden edition of the play (1952, p. xxxvii n.) considers that Perrett's points constitute the 'only . . . evidence' that Shakespeare used Camden, but he appears not to have carried the search further than the main story itself. Line numbers refer to this edition.

If we accept for Edgar the half-saintly significance which many critics have found in him, as peacemaker and the fugitive champion of natural love, then Camden's gloss, 'blessed honor', is apt enough. The gloss on 'Edmund' (the next name in Camden's list) does not correspond so neatly (p. 50):

EDMVND, Sax. for Eadmund, Happy, or blessed, peace: Our Lawyers yet doe acknowledge Mund for Peace in their word Mundbrech, for breach of Peace. . . .

Yet there is evidence of Shakespeare's carelessness in reading, and it is possible that he may have loosely associated the idea of violence, of 'mundbrech', with the name Edmund, and so have regarded it as suitable for the character of the 'universal wolf'. This notion is strengthened by the fact that the two names of Edgar and Edmund, as names of Anglo-Saxon kings, appear elsewhere in the Remaines, and the characters attached to them are very pertinent to those of the play. Camden sums it all up in these words (p. 90): 'King Edgar was called the Peaceable. . . king Edmund for his Valour, Iron-side.' If a reference of this kind was at the back of Shakespear's mind, it might also help to explain Albany's curious remark addressed to Edgar (v. iii. 175):

Methought thy very gait did prophesy
A royal nobleness. . . .

There is no other hint in the play that Edgar is 'royal' in any sense.

The glosses in Verstegan are less suggestive (pp. 252–3). 'Edgar' is derived from 'oath' and 'guard', and means 'a keeper of his othe or faithfull conuenant', which is near to the Shakespearian significance, but without the overtones of saintliness suggested by Camden. The derivation of 'Edmund' is quite beside the point. It is said to come from 'oath' and 'mouth', and to mean 'a mouth of troth-keeping or loyaltie'.

If Shakespeare read Camden, he may have been sent to another source where the names of Edgar, Edmund, and Oswald appear in close proximity: Hakluyt, whom Camden praises at p. 170.2 The early pages of Hakluyt contain much material on the early history of Britain: for instance (p. 6) a long account, taken from Florence of Worcester and others, of Edgar as 'Pacificus'. Edgar is seen, not only as a great king, but as a saintly, half-divine figure who 'had in his minde about six hundred yeeres past, the representation of . . . the . . . Idea . . . of the whole and onely one mysticall citie universall' under the protection of British peace and justice. (Later

1 To see this significance in the name Edmund does not, of course, prevent us from agreeing with K. Muir (R.E.S., n.s. ii (1951), 5) that it was suggested also by Harsnett's book.

NOTE

—pp. 202 ff.—there is an extract from the *Libell of English Policie* which stresses his role of protector of the poor.) Not far from this account of the saintliness of Edgar is another passage (p. 9) briefly describing a murder plot in which Edmund Ironsides and his son Edmund, and yet another Edgar, are mentioned. Hard by appears the name Oswald, as one of Edgar's bishops (p. 8). The names of various earls of Kent and Gloster are also to be found in the early pages of Hakluyt and in Camden. Two anecdotes of men holding these titles told by Camden may conceivably have had their effect on Shakespeare: one (p. 187) of Godwin, Earl of Kent, remarking, even though in jest, 'Now one brother did helpe another', and another (p. 196) of 'Robert Earle of Gloucester base sonne to king Henry the first, the onely martiall man of England in his age'. It is not necessary to suppose that Shakespeare bore all these things in mind when writing *King Lear*, but this grouping of the names Edgar, Edmund, Oswald, Kent and Gloster, both in Camden and in Hakluyt, may have suggested to him ways of filling in the bare outline of a sub-plot which he found in the *Arcadia*.

There is one more name to be accounted for: the alias of Caius, assumed by the exiled Kent. Shakespeare used the name elsewhere, and he had no need to go to Camden for it; but it is there, in a laconic lapidary style suited to the plain blunt Kent (second p. 52):

Doctor *Caius* a learned Phisition of Cambridge, and a co-founder of *Gunwell* and *Caius* colledge, hath onely on his monument there: FVI CAIVS.

This is almost Kent's 'I am the very man' (v. iii. 286). If, as is likely enough, Shakespeare used for the catalogue of dogs in *Macbeth*, and perhaps for some passages in *King Lear*, Caius's pamphlet *Of English Dogs*, translated by Abraham Fleming in 1576, that is one more reason why the name should recur to his mind.

Without going over the ground already covered by Perrett, it is necessary to recall that these scattered memories of personal names are not the only evidence for a connexion between the *Remaines* and *King Lear*. The Lear story itself occurs in the book (p. 183) with the peculiarity that it is told not of Lear, but of 'Ina', king of Wessex. Perrett suggests that this is a 'small literary fraud' on Camden's part, and that he was in fact basing himself on Polydore Virgil. Yet it may have been this transference from a British to a Saxon setting which encouraged Shakespeare to combine British and Saxon names in the play. There are other details too which may have aided Shakespeare's imagination: the two following anecdotes, for instance, may have supplied some details for Goneril and Regan:

King *Henry* the second grievously molested by the disobedience of his four sonnes, who entred into actuall rebellion against him, caused to be painted in
his great Chamber at his pallace in Winchester, an Eagle with foure yong chickens, whereof three pecked and scratched him, the fourth picked at his eyes . . . he said to one demaunding his meaning, That they were his sonnes which did so pecke him, and that Iohn the yongest whome he loved best, practised his death more busily than the rest (p. 160).

One Fulke a Frenchman . . . tolde this king Richard that he kept with him three daughters, that would procure him the wrath of God, if he did not shortly ridde himself of them. Why hypocrite (quoth the king) all the worlde knoweth that I never hadde childe, Yea (saide Fulke) you have as I said, three; and their names are Pride, Covetousness, and Lechery. (Is it so (saide the king) you shal see me presently bestow them . . . (p. 200).

The first of these anecdotes comes from a section on Impresas, in which we know Shakespeare was professionally interested; and from the same section comes this:

Out of Philosophie likewise an other, to notifie his greatest impeachment, drew this principle, EX NIHILO NIHIL: and inscribed it bend-wise, with his Armes in a bare shield (p. 167).

This, of course, recalls Lear’s bitter philosopher’s quip to Cordelia in the opening scene, ‘Nothing will come of nothing: speak again’ (l. 90). For the jests of the Fool, which depend so much on traditional speech, it is perhaps not wise to seek a specific source, but it may be noted that Camden has reference to Merlin’s prophecies and the ‘marring of malt with water’ (pp. 197, 235, cf. the prophecy at III. iii. 82), and to a jest of Heywood’s about fools and wise men changing coats (p. 234). But a memory of Camden is more likely in Lear’s description of the riches of his kingdom at the begin-
ning of the play:

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shady forests and with champains rich’d,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads
We make thee lady. . . .

(l. 63)

This may be compared with the lyrical description of Britain which opens Camden’s book (p. 1).

For water, it is walled and garded with the Ocean . . . and watered with pleasant fishfull and navigable rivers . . . aboundant in pasture . . . (for it hath more parkes than all Europe besides), plentifully wooded. . . .

It is also possible that Shakespeare may have remembered the Latin epigram on Britain quoted by Camden (p. 6), ironically inventing for tragic

1 Such praise, of course, is part of the standard description of Britain, and not confined to Camden: cf. Lambarde, Perambulation of Kent (1576), pp. 7–8; Geoffrey of Monmouth, ch. ii; Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica, i. i.
purposes every one of its points of praise: peace, clement skies, the fair
division of dowries, nature as kindly parent, and the harmony of luxus and
usus:

Anglia terra ferax, tibi pax secura quietem,
Multiplicem luxum merx opulenta dedit.
Tu nimio nec stricta gelu, nec sydere fervens,
Clementi cælo, temperieque places.
Cum pareret Natura parens, varioque favore
Divideret dotes omnibus vna locis: . . .
Quicquid amat luxus, quicquid desiderat vsus,
Ex te proveniet, vel aliunde tibi.

Lear’s speech beginning ‘O reason not the need. . .’ (II. iv. 266) is almost
a direct commentary on this ideal landscape of man and nature.

It appears, then, from these and other details which could be added to
make up a cumulative effect, that the connexion between the Remaines and
King Lear extends beyond the etymologies themselves. This is important,
for if it were not so, there would perhaps be no need to go further in search
of the names Edgar and Edmund than Holinshed, as was suggested by
Malone.¹ But, although there is a good deal of material about both Edgar
and Edmund, and also about Bishop Oswald, in Holinshed, it is scattered
and apparently without special significance. The meanings of the names
are not explained—notably, the aptness of the name Oswald for a steward is
not mentioned—there is no connexion with the Lear story, and above all the
two kings are not brought together in sharp contrast as peacemaker and
warrior: all these things are in Camden, along with a number of auxiliary
details which may have helped the Lear story. Shakespeare knew his
Holinshed out of long familiarity; and there is no very good reason why
he should have chosen the names Edgar and Edmund rather than any other
pair of the many historical names which Holinshed could offer. Camden
provides just such a reason.

If the argument here propounded is accepted, it has some bearing,
though not a strong one, on the date of the play. If we insist that Shake-
speare can only have known Camden’s book in its published form, then the
date of composition must be 1605 at the earliest. But those who hold to a
date in 1604 can justifiably argue that Shakespeare’s friendship for Jonson,
and Jonson’s for Camden, would make it quite possible for him to have seen
the book before publication.

S. Musgrove

¹ See Shakespeare, Plays and Poems, 3rd variorum edn. (London), 1821, x. 3.