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NAMELESSNESS IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA

Dorothy E. Litt

Institute for Research in History
New York, New York

I was first drawn to examine nameless characters in the drama of the English Renaissance when in studying their names I realized that three of the most memorable characters had no names: Lear's Fool, Lady Macbeth and the Duchess of Malfi. Before I began my research I had to resolve the basic question: were these characters intentionally unnamed? I decided that with authors such as Shakespeare and Webster I might safely assume that any consistent pattern found in the plays was intentional.

Namelessness is not entirely negative. Every character must be named in some way in the *dramatis personae*, speech prefixes, stage directions and dialogue. I consider a character nameless when he or she has no given name,

unless this is true of all or a group of characters; for titled men, for instance, this is conventional. Titled women, however, when they have no given names are worthy of study for they are thereby defined only by the title of their husbands.

I omit from study morality plays and pastoral plays with conventionally typed characters, masques with personified abstractions and humors characters. I have not dealt with minor characters, functionaries or grouped characters, although I do examine minor characters who are colorful, such as Lear's Fool and Falstaff's Page.

Namelessness has attracted little scholarly interest¹ despite its prevalence in the plays. I have examined 147 plays; of these 57 have nameless characters, that is, over 38%. There are about 948 plays extant for the period 1558-1642, so that I have only covered about 15% of the total.² Because the field is new I have tried to establish a tentative "poetics" for my study, in the form of questions to be answered:

1. How is the nameless character defined in terms of address, comments by others, and in action?
2. How does the character define himself?
3. How is the character distinguished from the named characters?
4. How does the play define names, naming and

namelessness?

5. How is the character cited in speech prefixes, stage directions and dramatis personae, as printed in the author's lifetime?

6. How does namelessness function in the play?

7. Is there any pattern: for the author? for the character? for the drama of the period?

Since I am only at the beginning of my research I am not ready to make wide-ranging generalizations (as in question 7), although I can draw some tentative conclusions. Basically, each character serves a unique function by his or her namelessness and as such may be contrasted with another nameless character in the same play; thus may be seen the chiasmic function of the Fool and Gloucester, the ladies Macbeth and Macduff, and the Duchess of Malfi and her brother, the Cardinal of Aragon. Namelessness offers a fresh way to approach a character; if no new interpretations are revealed thereby, old ones may be reinforced and enriched.

A pattern that may have wider application appears in the fact that the plays The Duchess of Malfi, Macbeth and King Lear all had their first performances within a six-year period, 1605 to 1611, and were all the property of the King's Men. At first this may seem a meaningless coincidence but it would seem reasonable to assume that playwrights of a company would make it

their business to see each others' plays, if only to keep up with the competition; they would thereby be influenced by each other's work, especially when a play was a hit. Of the 57 plays I studied, 29 were the property of the King's Men.³ These break down into 23 for James's reign and 9 for Charles's (the overlap is for 3 which are dated 1625, when the reigns change). Among the 57 plays may be found the most important dramatists of the period (App.).

The Fool in King Lear has no name but that of his calling. Through his mockery the term fool takes on the function of a proper name, noun (fool and folly), epithet, verb and adjective; ultimately it becomes a symbol of the human condition.

Lear is made the focus of the Fool's taunts as a fellow fool, while Goneril calls him an old fool (1.3.19); Kent is called a fool (1.4.95; 2.4.87); as is Albany (4.2.28, 58, 61); and Edgar is charged with "foolish honesty" (1.2.181).⁴ Finally, when Lear mourns over Cordelia, "my poor fool is hang'd" (5.3.306), the epithet is transformed into an endearment, embracing all those born to "this great stage of fools" (4.6.182).⁵

In the subplot, the Earl of Gloucester loses his name and title to his son Edmund. His loss of title leaves him as nameless as the fool. Just as the title

of fool is expanded to seem almost a contest for that title, so is that of Gloucester contested for as it is attributed variously to father and illegitimate son.⁶ The name of fool is redeemed in Cordelia, as is the name of Gloucester by his legitimate son. Edgar, disowned and banished, also acknowledges namelessness: "Edgar I nothing am" (2.3.21), and, at the point of challenge to Edmund, "my name is lost" (5.3.121). His quest⁷ to restore the good name of his father and himself is signalled by the Herald's announcing the challenge to the "supposed Earl of Gloucester" (5.3.114).⁸ In victory he declares to Edmund: "My name is Edgar, and thy father's son" (5.3.170); thus his name, his good name, is restored, with the right to his now dead father's title. Moreover, when he asserts his right to the name of Edgar we are reminded that Lear as his godfather had given him as a nameless infant that name (2.1.91). Thus, fittingly, Albany awards to Lear's godson the crown and title of King of Britain.

Lady Macbeth is called by her husband's name. She has no given name although in Shakespeare's source she is named Gruoch (Bullough 7.432). Her fierce ambition denies her own personhood, directed only toward advancing her husband's fortunes.

The witches embody the type of depersonalized, de-

feminized woman the lady aims to become.¹⁰ They, like her, are nameless. Their "deed without a name" finds its counterpart in the path of increasingly meaningless slaughter on which the Macbeths have ventured. Ironically, in a play about men, ambition and war, women are its driving force; Macbeth is first inspired by the witches' prophecy and carried forward on his mission by his lady. Running counter to this pattern is Lady Macduff's inability to convince her husband to remain with her at home.

Lady Macbeth's desire to destroy the woman in her presents her with a tragic dilemma, for to the world of men she is merely a woman. We see her at the banquet, at the high point of her career, a queen and Macbeth's "partner of greatness" (1.5.11) relegated, albeit in the seat of state, to sit alone awaiting the order to join the men, as Macbeth announces to the company:

Ourselves will mingle with society,
 And play the humble host.
 Our hostess keeps her state, but in best time
 We will require her welcome. (3.4.3-6)

He, furthermore, having once tasted blood goes on to kill without her advice or aid.

In madness the Lady's womanhood resurfaces in a guilt-ridden sympathy for that other nameless woman, Lady Macduff, wife of the Thane of Fife, in her seem-

ingly mad chant, "The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now?" (5.1.42). This bond of sisterhood is reinforced as unnamed women cry out in mourning for the Lady Macbeth's death (5.5.8).

Beyond denial of her womanhood the lady seeks to efface herself as a person; her namelessness heralds and emblemizes this process. At the beginning of the play she reads Macbeth's triumphant letter to her ignoring any loving salutation or complimentary close; its warm tone suggests she reads with selective inattention to such detail. Holinshed writes of her "unquenchable desire to bear the name of a queen" (144), yet in Shakespeare she is so thoroughly depersonalized that we never learn what having won that title means to her; she is never addressed as highness or majesty.

In madness she finds the symbol of her guilt in the extremities most distant from the self, in her hands. Eventually even Macbeth depersonalizes her as he asks, "How does your patient, doctor?" (5.3.37), and the doctor in like fashion speaks of "the patient" (5.3.45). She is accorded her title for the first time in the play when Seyton announces to Macbeth, "The Queen, my lord, is dead" (5.5.16).

Lady Macduff's namelessness reflects her dependence

on her husband; she is the antithesis to Lady Macbeth, avowedly feminine and maternal; yet neither woman can survive in the strife-torn world of the play. This nameless mother and her equally nameless children, "Those precious motives, those strong knots of love" (4.3.27), ultimately become symbols of home, love and domesticity, destroyed by tyranny.

The Duchess of Malfi is a widow and the sole ruler of her duchy.¹¹ She never acts in her public role in the play, yet her title insists on this role for it is the only designation we have for her. In its absence her lack of a Christian name¹² establishes a dialectic of public versus private concerns.¹³ The power of her public role informs her private self, making her strong-willed and aggressive in defying her brothers and in courting and seducing Antonio, her steward. As a woman, however, she remains vulnerable to the wills of her brothers; she is ultimately destroyed by them in her public and private roles.

She defines herself as a genderless ruler, one "born great" (1.2.360), a "prince" (3.2.138), and in her parable of the salmon, as one of the "great men" (3.5.139),¹⁴ whereas in her private life she calls herself "a young widow" (1.2.376). Her maid Cariola recognizes her mistress' conflict, her need to play the game both ways:

Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman
 Reigns most in her, I know not, but it shows
 A fearful madness: I owe her much of pity (1.2.420-22).

Finally, in answer to her own question, "Who am I?" (4.2.123), stands her dauntless assertion, "I am Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.141). Her defiant claim when all is lost resonates long after the final act of the play is done, yet it is instructive to note that in reality she is now no longer a duchess, for the Pope has deposed her by seizing her duchy (3.4.31-32). She insists on her title and the public role it signifies, stoically setting aside her lost battle to survive as a woman, sister, wife and mother, demanding recognition in a cry of intense passion and courage in the face of utter failure; her judgment may be faulted but not her heroic grandeur in defeat.¹⁵

Her brother the Cardinal of Aragon is, like his sister, without a Christian name. They have in common their titles, which define their public roles, and their greatness, but they are altogether different in their private roles on the human level. She is passionate whereas he is cold-blooded; although both believe at the outset that they are in control of their lives she is quickly disabused whereas he comes to acknowledge his failure only at the end of his life.

This nameless sister and brother are contrasted in parallel plot lines in the play.¹⁶ Both have illicit

lovers and both lose their titles; hers is wrested from her whereas he surrenders his ceremoniously and with honor when he is installed as a soldier to fight for the Pope at Mirandola (Boklund 2). This is made iconographic in the dumb show (3.4.7), where their positions on the wheel of fortune are visually underscored: just as she and her family are banished the Cardinal is invested as the Pope's champion.

Fortune's wheel is reversed as they prepare for death. She stoically asserts that "Men oft are valued high,/ When th' are most wretch'd" (3.5.140), recognizing that she is now part of a genderless humanity, defined by suffering. It is a more profound understanding of herself. She goes on to find a new sense of humility in the recognition that there is no place for "greatness" in Heaven (4.2.232-34). The Cardinal, by contrast, is haunted by thoughts of Hell (5.5.1), and whimpers at his death, "And now, I pray, let me/ Be laid by, and never thought of" (5.5.89-90), in a new sense of worthlessness.

The nameless character may offer a glimpse into the dramatist's method. Falstaff's little page appears in three plays of the Falstaff cycle. He is first introduced in 2 Henry IV when Hal presents him to his friend as a gift (2.2.70).¹⁸ The boy quickly becomes precocious under his master's tutelage and example. He has no name other than Page. He is addressed in affectionate, colorful terms, as a "whoreson upright rabbit"

(2.2.85), and a "little tiny thief" (5.3.57), suggesting his popularity within the play and probably with the audience, which would justify his reappearance in three plays.

One would expect the little nameless page to become more like his master when he reappears in Henry V, but such an expectation is denied. He is no longer a page, for Falstaff is now dead; now he is called Boy as he joins the men in war. Nature seems to win out over nurture as the boy decides to desert Pistol, Bardolph and Fluellen, asserting,

I am boy to them all three [but they] could not be man to/me...I must leave them, and seek/some better service. Their villainy goes against my/ weak stomach... (3.2.29-31, 51-53).

He goes on to die bravely at the hands of the French. Falstaff's death, along with the hardships of war, has altered the boy.

He reappears as a page in The Merry Wives of Windsor with the name of Robin. At first sight it would seem that he has been given a name merely to distinguish him from Master Page, also called Page, in stage directions, speech prefixes and dialogue, but we find the boy still called a little page when Mistress Quickly asks for him,

Mistress Page would desire you to send her/ your little page, of all loves. Her husband has a/

marvellous infection to the little page; and/
truly Master Page is an honest man...You must
send/ her your page, no remedy (2.2.113-22).¹⁹

quickly mingles big and little Pages in one breathless rush. We discover, moreover, that Mistress Page already has a servant called Robin who, in his sole appearance, leaves the room just as little Robin enters. To call attention to the duplication Mistress Page announces, "Here comes little Robin" (3.3.21). Shakespeare's intent it would seem was for merry confusion, for now the Page household contains two Robins and five Pages; simplification was not in Shakespeare's mind when giving the page his name.

Another interesting aspect of namelessness occurs when a character left nameless in stage directions, speech prefixes and dialogue is out of dramatic necessity named only once. Thus in Ben Jonson's New Inn²⁰ Lord Beaufort reveals his Christian name when Fly reports to the Host that Beaufort has been married and, to authenticate his report, Fly says he "heard the words, 'I Philip, take thee Lactice'" (487). The name seems to have been revealed solely for the purpose of completing the time-worn phrase of the marriage rite. Possibly Jonson inserted the name of the actor who played the role. Since we do not know the date of the play's first performance we have no way of ascertaining who he was.

A similar instance occurs in John Fletcher's Bond-
uca.²¹ The eponymous Queen has two daughters who appear in stage directions and speech prefixes as First Daughter and Second Daughter. They are warrior maidens like their mother. The Second Daughter reveals her name for the first and only time when her letter to the Roman Captain is read aloud, rounded off at the close with the name, Young Bonvica (3.2.35). Her name is so much like her mother's that it suggests Fletcher saw the girls as mere extensions of their mother, leaving them without names to distinguish them in this play of men and war where women, especially would-be Amazons, have no place.

A more organic function for a nominal slip occurs in the anonymous play, Edward III.²² The Countess of Salisbury has no given name. This becomes an issue when King Edward falls in love with her and asks Lodowick to win her for him (446). Earlier Lodowick had remarked in a soliloquy that Edward seemed in "passion...rack'd" with desire for the Countess (444). Thus, when Edward asks him to write her a letter for him Lodowick pretends **not to know** whom Edward means, asking tongue-in-cheek, "To whom, my lord, shall I direct my style? ... Write I to a woman?...Of what condition or estate..." (446-47); Edward offers no name. Lodowick presses on with the letter, "More fair, and chaste" (448); the lady

and the king are married persons. Edward interposes hastily, "I did not bid thee talk of chastity" (448).

The Countess enters and Lodowick is sent off to complete the letter. Edward sues for her favor and she denies his suit with a seemingly gratuitous revelation of her name, "That love, you beg of me, I cannot give;/ for Sarah owes that duty to her lord" (451). The name which Lodowick had angled for 170 lines before, "To whom, my Lord, shall I direct my style?" is now disclosed, at the same time establishing a link with that Old Testament matron, Sarah, who escaped Pharoah's designs (Genesis 12), adumbrating the Countess' eventual escape from this latter-day Pharoah. The name, asked for, withheld and finally revealed, was part of the dramatists' plan. Less certain is it that this plan was in the author's mind from the outset, for Sarah had earlier outwitted the Scottish King David, for which there is no biblical analogue, and Sarah's husband, the Earl of Salisbury, has no given name in the play.

Much work remains to be done in the study of nameless characters in English Renaissance plays. It is instructive to note how differently nameless women are defined by their namelessness in the few examples discussed here. The subject deserves closer attention.

Dorothy E. Litt
 Institute for Research in History
 New York, New York

Appendix: Plays with Nameless Characters²³

<u>Play</u>	<u>Earliest Performance</u>	<u>Company</u>	<u>Author</u>
<u>Aglaura</u>	1637	King	Suckling
<u>All's Well</u>	c. 1601-4	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>As You Like It</u>	1603	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>Bonduca</u>	1611-14	King	Fletcher
<u>Broken Heart</u>	c. 1625-33	King	Ford
<u>Bussy D'Ambois</u>	1600-4	Paul	Chapman
<u>Cambises</u>	c. 1558-69	Court (?)	Preston
<u>Captain</u>	1609-12	King	Beaumont & Fletcher
<u>Cardinal</u>	lic. 1641	King	Shirley
<u>Chances</u>	1613-25	King	Fletcher
<u>Coxcomb</u>	1621-22	King	Beaumont & Fletcher
<u>Cymbeline</u>	c. 1608-11	King	Shakespeare
<u>Duchess of Malfi</u>	1605-6	King	Webster
<u>Edward II</u>	1591-93	Pembroke	Marlowe
<u>Edward III</u>	c. 1590-95	?	Anon.
<u>Fair Maid of the Inn</u>	lic. 1626	King	Fletcher, et al
<u>Fair Quarrel</u>	c. 1615-17	Prince	Middleton & Rowley
<u>Goblins</u>	c. 1637-41	King	Suckling
<u>Hamlet</u>	1599-c. 1601	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>1 Henry IV</u>	c. 1596-98	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>2 Henry IV</u>	c. 1597-98	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>Henry V</u>	1599	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>Honest Man's Fortune</u>	1613	Lady Elizabeth	Fletcher (et al?)
<u>Humorous Day's Mirth</u>	1597	Admiral	Chapman
<u>Humorous Lieutenant</u>	1619 (?)	King	Fletcher
<u>Island Princess</u>	1619-21	King	Fletcher
<u>James IV</u>	1590-91	Queen	Greene
<u>King Lear</u>	1605 (?)	King	Shakespeare
<u>Love's Cure</u>	1625 (?)	King (?)	Beaumont & Fletcher
<u>Love's Labor's Lost</u>	c. 1588-97	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>Love's Pilgrimage</u>	1616 (?)	King	Fletcher & (?) Beaumont
<u>Loyal Subject</u>	lic. 1618(?)	King	Fletcher
<u>Macbeth</u>	1608-11 (?)	King	Shakespeare
<u>Maid's Tragedy</u>	c. 1608-11	King	Beaumont & Fletcher
<u>Massacre at Paris</u>	1593	Strange	Marlowe
<u>Merry Wives of Windsor</u>	1597-1602	Chamberlain	Shakespeare

<u>Play</u>	<u>Earliest Performance</u>	<u>Company</u>	<u>Author</u>
<u>Midsummer Night's Dream</u>	1594-98	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>More Dissemblers besides Women</u>	c. 1615 (?)	King	Middleton
<u>Mucedorus</u>	1588-98	?	Anon.
<u>New Inn</u>	lic. 1629	King	Jonson
<u>Nice Valor</u>	c. 1615-25	?	Fletcher
<u>Noble Gentleman</u>	lic. 1626	King	Beaumont &/or Fletcher
<u>Pericles</u>	1606-8	King	Shakespeare
<u>Queen of Corinth</u>	1616-c. 1618	King	Fletcher, Mass- inger & Field
<u>Revenger's Tragedy</u>	1606-7	King	Tourneur (?), Middleton(?)
<u>Richard III</u>	1594-95	Chamberlain	Shakespeare
<u>Scornful Lady</u>	1613-16	Queen's Rev- els (?)	Beaumont & Fletcher
<u>Shoemakers' Holi- day</u>	1599	Admiral	Dekker
<u>Spanish Tragedy</u>	1582-92	Strange	Kyd
<u>1 & 2 Tamburlaine</u>	1587-88	Admiral	Marlowe
<u>Widow</u>	c. 1615-17	King	Middleton
<u>Widow's Tears</u>	1612-13	Children of the Chapel	Chapman
<u>Winter's Tale</u>	c. 1610-11	King	Shakespeare
<u>Witch</u>	c. 1609-16	King	Middleton
<u>Woman Hater</u>	1606	Paul	Beaumont & Fletcher
<u>Women Pleased</u>	1619-23	King	Fletcher
<u>Woodstock</u>	1591-95	?	Anon.

NOTES

¹An exception is the discussion by Levith (42, 57, 59, 69, 92, 95).

²The play count is based on Harbage and Schoenbaum.

³Riewald (173) notes the possibility of authorial influence within a company, albeit in a different context, and L. H. Thorndike argues for authorial influence between rival companies (65-66, 69). For the plays studies, see Appendix.

⁴All references to plays by Shakespeare are to the Riverside Shakespeare.

⁵For the ambiguity of folly as a "keynote to the tragedy" see Welsford (257-58); for Albany as fool, see Welsford (258); for Kent, see Welsford (254); for Lear, see Welsford (254-55, 262-63); for Cordelia, see Berry (631), and Dusinger, who observes that the Fool and Cordelia "share the same area of consciousness" in Lear's mind (114). For the various meanings of poor fool as an endearment, see New Variorum. For the play's double plot, see Jayne.

⁶Cornwall signals the change as he addresses Edmund as "my Lord of Gloucester" (3.7.12-13), followed by Goneril (4.2.25; 4.3.84; 5.3.152). Oswald, at first

unaware of the change, uses the title for the father (3.7.14-15), and then for the son (4.6.249). The title is attributed to the father by the Messenger (4.2.72), and Albany (4.2.72, 80, 94), who are apparently not aware of the change either. Stage directions and speech prefixes continue to name Gloucester and Edmund as before the title change.

⁷Garber discusses Edgar's quest for his name (52-53, 78), but does not link it with the father's name.

⁸Since the old Earl is not yet known to be dead his right as claimant to the title is implied.

⁹Lady Macbeth's masculinity is discussed by Dusinberre (284) and Woodbridge (155).

¹⁰Woodbridge discusses the link between the lady and the witches (155).

¹¹All references to The Duchess of Malfi refer to the Gunby edition (Webster).

¹²Whigham notes that the Duchess has no "independent proper name" in Webster (174), and Leech that none of the literary versions of her tragedy give her a name until the 19th century (25). The historical Duchess was named Giovanna Piccolomini (Boklund 2).

¹³The Duchess' private-public roles in conflict are discussed in Peterson (22 ff., 35, 63-64, 74 ff., et passim).

¹⁴It is significant that the Duchess speaks of herself in masculine terms; the fishes of the parable are female but the "great men" seem clearly to include her. Such an attitude makes contrasting her with a man, the Cardinal, although unusual for the period, more justifiable. Parallel plot lines are discussed above as well as the idea of a genderless humanity.

¹⁵For an **inter**pretation of the Duchess as fallible and culpable, see Peterson (*passim*). Garber discusses the question, "Who am I?" as the question Shakespeare's tragic heroes pose (55-56); this quest for a name seems to me equally applicable to the Duchess.

¹⁶The real Cardinal was named Lodovico (Boklund 1). Although it is beyond the province of this paper to discuss, it is noteworthy that the play offers many permutations of paired characters: the Duchess and Julia (Peterson 101, 103-4, *et passim*); the Duchess and her two brothers, "three fair medals/ Cast in one figure" (1.2. 113-14); the Duchess and her twin Ferdinand; Ferdinand and the Cardinal in opposition to their sister; Ferdinand and Castruchio as the imagined and the real cuckolds (for the incest theme, see Whigham: 167 ff.); the Duchess and Cariola, as a comment on class differences; and Antonio and Julia as lovers of the "great ones."

¹⁷ Selzer contrasts the ways of dying (78-79). The Cardinal somewhat redeems himself when, in dying, he asks that Ferdinand be looked after (5.5.37).

¹⁸ A page could serve no man below the degree of lord (Cunnington 170). Apparently Hal circumvented the legal restriction for his comrade. Of course the historical Sir John Oldcastle was the Lord Cobham, who would have been entitled to have a page.

¹⁹ Levith comments on the punning of page/Page (83). Mistress Quickly, somewhat like the Page, remains unnamed until in Henry V she acquires the Christian name of Nell (2.1.18), presumably to suit her new marital status, for she is Quickly no more.

²⁰ All references to The New Inn are to the Dent edition (Jonson).

²¹ All references to Bonduca are to the Bowers edition (Fletcher).

²² All references to Edward III are to the Dyce edition (Anon.).

²³ The source of information here is taken from Harbage and Schoenbaum.

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