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*“Men whose glory it is to be known”:  
Godwin, Bentham, and  
the London Corresponding Society*

*Sophie Coulombeau*

**D**uring the course of his flight from the law, Godwin’s servant-spy Caleb Williams is repeatedly assailed with orally or legibly transmitted repetitions of his own name. These moments of naming operate as sites upon which Caleb’s identity is disputed, his sense of selfhood altered, and the direction of his peregrinations modified. The frequency of these instances, and the intensity of the performative functions they exercise upon Caleb’s ability to formulate a coherent sense of selfhood, suggest a reading of Godwin’s novel as a consideration of the relationship between proper naming and personal identity.

The precise effects produced upon Caleb by an encounter with his name vary dramatically. For instance, when he first arrives in London and hears his name bawled by a hawker selling papers detailing “the Most Wonderful and Surprising History, and Miraculous Adventures of Caleb Williams” he is “petrified” at “these amazing and dreadful sounds” and becomes convinced that the circulation of his name signifies “the consummation of my misfortune.” The confirmation of his name’s written dissemination provided by the pamphlet prompts him to commit a practically pointless but symbolically significant action, given the number of handbills circulating throughout the capital: “I carefully and deliberately destroyed the paper I had been reading, by tearing it into a thousand pieces.”<sup>1</sup> Conversely, overhearing a group of labourers

discussing “my history, whom with a slight variation of circumstances they styled the notorious housebreaker, Kit Williams,” Caleb undergoes an almost antithetical process: “My soul seemed to expand; I felt a pride in the self-possession and lightness of heart with which I could listen to the scene; and I determined to prolong and heighten the enjoyment.”<sup>2</sup> In both instances, the mention of his name acts as a prompt for Caleb actively to solicit further information about his own identity; in the first case by purchasing and reading the pamphlet in order to discover to whom he is “equalled,” and in the second by enquiring of the hostess of the tavern “what sort of man this Kit Williams might be?”

The fact that these two incidents produce such radically different emotional responses suggests recognition of what Jane Caplan, addressing the history of identity documentation practices, has called the personal name’s ability to “appear either as alienation or threat, or as a confirmation of identity.”<sup>3</sup> Theorists of surveillance studies, the field of scholarship that addresses surveillance practices largely from a sociological perspective, have occasionally considered how this onomastic tension might suggest new readings of the relationship between the state and the subject as experienced through feelings of individual and collective identity. I want to place *Caleb Williams* within this investigative field, and simultaneously to bring the methodologies of surveillance studies to bear on the substantial body of criticism that has advanced understanding of Godwin’s novel from a literary-historical perspective.

In doing so, I will locate Godwin’s novel within a network of broadly contemporary discourses that also address the relationship between naming and identity, arguing that language has an important role in creating processes of social atomization or assimilation. The perceived potential of different forms of naming to either atomize or assimilate the individual, and to be either inimical or advantageous to personal liberty, is a curiously under-remarked preoccupation of much literature of the 1780s and 1790s. In his writings on penal law, largely compiled during the early 1780s, Jeremy Bentham proposed a new

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universal nomenclature, in which individuals' unique names might be tattooed on their wrists. Paradoxically, Bentham insisted that as well as facilitating the detection of crime, his system would also be "highly favourable to personal liberty"<sup>4</sup> by reducing the necessity of imprisonment and enabling a more accurate and invested ownership of personal repute. This essay will suggest that Bentham and Godwin's roughly contemporaneous considerations of this tension respond to the perceived ability of naming to create conditions of social atomization or assimilation. It will also argue that both Godwin and Bentham's writings can be seen as contributions to an eighteenth-century cultural discourse of anxiety among the propertied classes about the relationship between anonymity and lower class crime. Both texts, in discussing oral and legible circulations of the personal name, imply that ownership of the atomized personal name and corresponding repute benefits men of property, "men whose glory it is to be known," but that assimilation into group names or titles might prove more advantageous for those without property. The essay will conclude by considering several reports and official documents that highlight the extent to which acts of collective naming were politicized in the self-fashioning of members of the London Corresponding Society during the 1790s. In these instances, ranging from the trial of Maurice Margarot for sedition to the textual self-fashioning of Richard 'Citizen' Lee to the arrest of Edward Marcus Despard, one can observe the concerns about appropriate naming that underlie Godwin and Bentham's writings coming to shape both individuals' self-fashionings and disciplinary practices in 1790s Britain.

A number of critics have already argued in recent years that *Caleb Williams*, in engaging so intensively with the ethics of surveillance, should be understood to be rooted in the political conditions of the 1790s.<sup>5</sup> I find James Thompson's approach, which rather than seeing the text as a direct response to any particular political incident, identifies its primary concern as dramatizing "the penetration of state apparatus into the everyday lives of individuals,"<sup>6</sup> particularly convincing. However, despite the fact that Thompson and others draw heavily on Foucauldian

theory about the development of this state apparatus to support their claims, they seem to have placed disproportionate emphasis on methodologies of visual observance, and relatively little on Foucault's insistence that data collection also formed an important pillar of the new regime of punishment. The disciplinary methods Foucault describes "lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and a method of domination," rendering legible description of personal data such as proper names "no longer a monument for future memory, but a document for possible use."<sup>7</sup> To redress this critical imbalance, I want to devote attention to Godwin's and Bentham's depictions of the dissemination and mutation of the personal name as data, and the function it might exercise within this negotiation of surveillance methodologies.

It is important to clarify exactly what I mean by the 'name' at this point, since much Godwin scholarship to date has also extensively addressed Ferdinando Falkland's fetishization of reputation as the motivating force behind his persecution of Caleb. Mark Philp, for example, has pointed out how

the values and prejudices praised by Burke and modelled by Falkland [...] rely on such selfish motives as the love of fame and a concern for one's honour and reputation.... Godwin's moral is that men like Falkland, immersed in a chivalric code and a concern for reputation, are unable to avoid falling into evil.<sup>8</sup>

I want to historicize Philp's astute identification of concern for "good name" as a crucial factor in the power struggles between Barnabas Tyrrel and Falkland in the first place, and Caleb and Falkland in the second, and in so doing to ground it firmly in the material conditions of contemporary name circulation. The synonymic split of the word "name" is no coincidence; the reputational name is entirely contingent upon the passage and the materially rooted associations of the literal proper name. I do not think that the notion of *repute* can be comprehensively understood without taking into account the material methods by and

contexts within which Godwin, Bentham and other contemporary political writers and agents, understood personal names to circulate, mutate, represent, and connote.

In 1782, Bentham wrote a body of proposals under the title "Indirect Legislation," which would not be published in English until 1838, and then only in dramatically abridged and inaccurately paraphrased form. One chapter of this body of work, subtitled "Exposing the person of the offender to discovery," considers the difficulty of detecting criminals, surveys a range of contemporary practices that strive towards this end, and ultimately makes a case for the regulation and controlled circulation of personal names as a panacea for the ills that previous mechanisms have failed to redress.

The problem faced by the law enforcer, Bentham asserts at the beginning of his chapter, is that there is no reliable link between a particular crime and a particular offender post-crime. "To punish a man in almost any way whatever, you must know who he is: you must know not only that such and such an offence has been committed, but that it was such an [*sic*] one that committed it."<sup>9</sup> Regrettably, the criminal has a habit of attempting to conceal his identity after an offence has been committed, and therefore pre-emptive identificatory action is the law enforcer's only solution: "If any thing then be done to a man to make him known, and give you a clue to find him by, it must be done beforehand: by fixing on him some mark which may enable you to find him, in the event of his doing any thing which may call for the research." Subjects, then, must be marked with the assumption that they might offend against the state; their visual ordering must reflect the future possibility that the state may need to identify and punish them.

Bentham distinguishes two categories of identification practices already in use: "A man may be known either directly by his person; or indirectly by means of some external article he is attached to such as his apparel or the implements of his profession."<sup>10</sup> This distinction replicates the broad practices that Valentin Groebner has argued constitute the history of identity documentation up until the eighteenth century: "the

prehistory of the wanted poster [by which the suspect is identified, though often ineptly, “by his person”] and the pass [an “external article he is attached to”].”<sup>11</sup> Bentham notes the existence of a number of contemporary practices that facilitate identification by means of the second category, including various conventions of dress that symbolize professional, marital, or social distinctions; military, naval, academic, professional, servants’ liveries, wedding rings, constables’ staves, badges to signal that the wearer is a recipient of poor relief, and “various marks [...] to distinguish working convicts.” However, he notes that these expedients are unsatisfactory from the perspective of the law enforcer, since they indicate only collective categories and not unique individual identities: “the determination of the class is of use no otherwise than in as far as it leads to the determination of the individual.”<sup>12</sup> There are certain embryonic systems underway, Bentham adds, which are more successful in allocating unique marks of identity to individuals: the germ of a vehicle registration system in the wake of the 1694 Act for Licensing and Regulating Hackney Coaches and Chairs, an embryonic system of house numbers in London, and the practice in Bridewell Hospital of charity children having “each a number by way of a badge.” At greater length than any of these, Bentham references the observations of the Swedish naturalist Carl Peter Thunberg upon his travels in Japan: ““You seldom meet with a man who has not his *mark* imprinted on the sleeves and back of his cloaths [*sic*], in the same colour in which the pattern is worked: white spots are left in manufacturing them for the purpose of inserting these marks’ [...]. By a man’s *mark*, I take for granted the author means his *name*.”<sup>13</sup>

The problem with all of these practices, from Bentham’s perspective – even the ones that signify individual rather than collective identity – is that the mark of identity is transferable: “A Coach, a chair, a cart, a waggon, a wherry will point a man out, so long as he stands by them: so may his regimental coat point out a soldier so long as he thinks fit to keep it on. But it is possible for a man to throw off his coat: it is possible for him to sally forth without his coach, or if hard pressed to run away

and leave it. It takes time to go and make enquiry at the office, and in the mean while, if it be a serious affair, the man is gone."<sup>14</sup> Unique bodily characteristics that cannot easily be altered, such as facial features, are of course more reliable – or at least less transferable – signs of identity than items of clothing or badges. But these bodily marks, Bentham complains, are subject to a different inadequacy than their transferable counterparts; it is much more difficult to describe them accurately: "But of the nice particularities that discriminate the human form – verbal descriptions are very inadequate *indicia* in comparison of graphical representations. Who ever from the minutest and exactest verbal description that was ever given formed so precise an idea of the person described as he might have drawn from the most transient glance?"<sup>15</sup>

*Caleb Williams*, in its depiction of Caleb's attempts to evade the authorities, offers a striking dramatization of Bentham's sketch of the law enforcer's problem of identification. Following the circulation of the handbill describing his appearance, Caleb understands "that one of the principal dangers that threatened me was the recognition of my person [...]. It seemed prudent therefore to disguise it as effectually as I could." Accordingly, he slips between classes, races, and professions by means of modifying his clothing, posture, and accent. Initially emulating a beggar, he adapts his vestments accordingly, selecting "the worst apparel I could find, and this I reduced to a still more deplorable condition, by rents that I purposely made in various places" along with a "peculiar slouching and clownish gait" and "Irish brogue." Subsequently, he disguises himself as "the son of a reputable farmer of the lower class," and finally as a Jew, with altered "complexion," "countenance" and "new habiliments."<sup>16</sup>

Caleb is rather proud of his talent for disguise and mimicry: immediately after his first transition, he assures himself, "I had rendered my appearance complete, nor would any one have suspected that I was not one of the fraternity to which I assumed to belong," and after putting the finishing touches to his Jewish guise he exults that, "when my metamorphosis was finished, I could not upon the strictest examination



conceive, that any one could have traced out the person of Caleb Williams in this new disguise.” Although to a modern readership many of Caleb’s ploys seem a little bizarre (tying a handkerchief around the lower part of his face, for example, which doesn’t immediately suggest itself as something a farmer’s son might do), we can perhaps read this gap between our own parameters of recognition and Godwin’s as a signal of the tectonic manner in which mechanisms of recognition have shifted over the last two centuries, mostly due to the invention of photography. Godwin’s earliest readers, I think, were certainly expected to take Caleb’s ability to shape-shift seriously. When Falkland’s agent Jones finally traps Caleb at Mr. Spurrel’s lodgings, his reaction to being brought face to face with his quarry seems to validate Caleb’s confidence in his disguise. Still unsure whether he has really cornered the right man, Jones instructs him to dismember himself: “Why, said Jones, our errand is with one Caleb Williams, and a precious rascal he is! I ought to know the chap well enough; but they say he has as many faces as there are days in the year. So you please to pull off your face; or if you cannot do that, at least you can cut off your clothes, and let us see what your hump is made of.”<sup>17</sup>

Jones’s semantic conflation of unmasking with mutilation recalls Bentham’s observation that where an individual engaged in a criminal act has clearly attempted to conceal his identity, “we may expect to find him animadverted upon by the law with aggravated severity. Accordingly a British statute punishes with death any one of a great multitude of offences many of them of a very trivial nature, in the case of their being committed by persons in disguise.”<sup>18</sup> Here, Bentham refers to the draconian Black Act of 1723, which, as the work of E.P. Thompson has demonstrated, acted as a legislative crystallization of the anxiety with which lawmakers drawn from the landowning classes viewed disguise, dissimulation, and anonymity in the lower orders. As Thompson points out, thanks to successive judgements enlarging the scope of the Act over the mid-eighteenth century, the fact of persons “having his or her faces blacked” could stand by itself as a capital offence even where they were

not armed with offensive weapons, and it was only in the early nineteenth century that more humane judicial decisions started to render this offence null and void.<sup>19</sup> One can assume, therefore, that neither Bentham nor contemporary readers of *Caleb Williams* found the idea of a man slipping from disguise to disguise comical. One potential reason why the novel's first readers found it "sublimely horrible – captivatingly Frightful"<sup>20</sup> is because they were reading and writing from within a culture within which "themes of disguise and confusion, the alias, and shifting identities,"<sup>21</sup> most often manifested in the stock form of the shape-shifter, stood for a range of acute anxieties about class violence, fraud, and social displacement. Caleb, with his "considerable facility in the art of imitation" and "talent for mimicry," represents both Bentham's unmarked offender slipping between coats and carriages, and a popular figure of anxiety in a wider cultural discourse.

Caleb himself, to a certain extent, participates in this anxiety. Despite boasting about his talent for mimicry, he criticizes disguise as an "unmanly" pursuit, and his own disgust at the "figure I seemed to exhibit" is partly responsible for his eventual surrender to Jones and his onomastic declaration of identity: "At last, tired with this scene of mummery, and disgusted beyond measure with the base and hypocritical figure I seemed to exhibit, I exclaimed, "Well, I am Caleb Williams; conduct me wherever you please!"<sup>22</sup> But he places the blame for the necessity to disguise himself with his social superiors: "Such are the miserable expedients and so great the studied artifice, which man, who never deserves the name of manhood but in proportion as he is erect and independent, may find it necessary to employ, for the purpose of eluding the inexorable animosity and unfeeling tyranny of his fellow man!"<sup>23</sup> Where Bentham's representation of the sartorial impostor is fraught with criminality, Godwin's – in offering the reader the perspective of the shape-shifter – temporarily suggests the modification of dress as a valid instrument to avoid state repression. Ultimately, however, it is depicted as an inadequate measure for the purposes of a protagonist wishing to assert his identity as an "erect and independent" person.

Moreover, Godwin indicates that once an individual has engaged in the ethically problematic process of visual disguise, he has surrendered the moral right to assert his identity in a way that may backfire. One of the problems of using visual self-styling to evade the law is literalized in an encounter with precisely the kind of non-pictorial handbill description that Bentham criticizes as inherently inaccurate. Arrested just as he is about to escape to Ireland, Caleb learns (to his relief) that he has been mistaken for a wanted highwayman. He assumes he will be able to prove his innocence easily by pointing out the discrepancies between the description and his own appearance. However, this isn't as easy as he had anticipated:

They had a description of his person which, though, as I afterwards found, it disagreed from mine in several material articles, appeared to them to tally to the minutest tittle [...]. I referred to the paper, and shewed [the magistrate] that the description neither tallied as to height nor complexion. But then it did as to years and the colour of the hair; and it was not this gentleman's habit, as he informed me, to squabble about trifles, or to let a man's neck out of the halter for a pretended flaw of a few inches in his stature. If a man were too short, he said, there was no remedy like a little stretching.<sup>24</sup>

The conflation of disciplinary mutilation with disguise is striking. The gallows humour of the magistrate provides a literalization of Bentham's observation that the law acts to punish mutations of visible appearance with its own work on the integrity of the body. Once the individual becomes a shape-shifter, the law recognizes this as a legitimate cue to stretch, break, or mutilate in its turn.

Suspecting the inadequacy of visual self-styling to ensure a clear correspondence between offender and deserved treatment by the state, Godwin and Bentham both move to consider the potential of the personal name to ensure a more effective correspondence. For Bentham, the solution is a proposal to tattoo subjects on the wrist with their own

unique and regulated names. This scheme, he believes, would unite the uniqueness and legibility of a number or "mark" with the permanence of a facial profile. He was inspired to suggest this system, he explains, by taking notice of a mark on the wrist of a naval friend: "It consisted of his name at length, exhibited in characters of a deep blue. It had been imprinted in his childhood, and he was then verging to old age. The idea struck me: and why, said I to myself, should not the practise be universal? What stronger preservative could there be for purity of morals and obedience to the laws?"<sup>25</sup>

But the personal name as currently circulated, Bentham contends, is just as transferable as a garment, and therefore equally open to abuse: "Thieves and sharpers are very apt to change their names: when a man's name is grown dirty he throws it off as he would his shirt, and takes another. The changing of one's name accompanied with the change of abode and without any known reason openly assigned is as reasonable a presumption as can well take place, or delinquency either perpetrated or designed [...]. Yet in no body of laws which I rather wonder at, have I ever found it penal."<sup>26</sup> Given this, Bentham makes a prescient case for moving to regulate names statutorily, just as – within a decade or so – the French revolutionary government would move to do:

The institution of marking would render it utterly impracticable [...] you may see at any time what a mans name [*sic*] is at that time; and the name he bears once he bears for ever. I shall hereafter have occasion to propose the making it penal for a man to change his name without taking such steps as shall ensure the notoriety of it: this institution if it did not supersede the occasion making it unnecessary to establish such a penalty would supersede the infliction of it by reducing the chance of impunity to nothing.<sup>27</sup>

There are, Bentham acknowledges "two capital objections" to his proposal. The first is unpopularity: "the danger there would be that an institution of this sort if attempted to be introduced would give an

invincible disgust to the body of the people.” This objection should be seen as a “caution respecting the manner in which the business should be gone about [...] instruction should precede coercion.” However, Bentham advises that “a mere presumption of its unpopularity however well grounded in appearance can never be a sufficient ground for its rejection.”<sup>28</sup>

In what spirit should one read this hypothesized “invincible disgust”? As well as the obvious fact that tattooing technically constitutes a physical mutilation that is uncomfortable at best, the practice invoked a range of connotations that fit discordantly with the popular notion of the free, civilized and Christian Englishman. Jane Caplan has described the “uneasy and ambiguous status” occupied by tattooing within Western culture during the early modern period: “body-marking was usually treated as punitive and stigmatic rather than honourable and decorative.”<sup>29</sup> To impose a mark of otherness upon the body of the British subject – in transgression of biblical prescriptions against tattooing and in emulation of “foreign” practices – might be perceived, Bentham appears to acknowledge, to decenter his Christian, masculine, civilized identity. It might also be perceived to be a fundamental modification of the notion of British political liberties. A second objection to the scheme “confined to British ground,” which Bentham insists “would hardly be thought of any where else,” is that “the institution [of tattooing] it might be said would be favourable to tyranny, by throwing too much power into the hands of government, and rendering the political sanction too independent of the moral.” Again, Bentham mentions this objection only in order to give it rather short shrift: “I mention this as deserving to be attended to an even respect, not as deserving to be conclusive.” He conceptualizes liberty, as far as it can be used as a term, as a physical freedom rather than a right not to be known by the authorities:

It might render plots and secret conspiracies somewhat more difficult to form. But it is not by plots and conspiracies that efficacy is given to the

constitutional claims of a large body of the people. The liberties of a country real or pretended are maintained not by the intrigues of a few but by the corroboration of the many: not in holes and corners but in the face of day: not by men whose shame it is, but by men whose glory it is, to be known: by the general concurrence of persons of all ranks, magistrates, and gentlemen as well as yeomen. Though the persons of Britons were variegated all over like those of their ancestors of old, they would not be the less able to print opposition pamphlets or to attend at public meetings: at a less price than the maintenance of these dangerous rights, political liberty like the British can never be preserved: and while the former *are* maintained, the latter never can be lost.<sup>30</sup>

In line with this conception of liberty as a primarily physical state of being, Bentham insists that the practice of universal tattooing would ultimately be "highly favourable to personal liberty." He points out that in many cases imprisonment upon mesne processes (preliminary imprisonment before trial, such as that experienced by Caleb Williams) is a hardship only necessary in order to avoid the possibility of the accused absconding, and suggests that since it would be impossible for the accused effectively to disappear once marked, this imprisonment could be disposed of altogether. This proposed deal offers the hypothetical lawbreaking individual an increase in physical liberty that is set firmly within a framework of onomastic submission. It is precisely Bentham's conceptualization of liberty that Foucault argues is modified as the eighteenth century draws towards a close; which modification, as we will see, is fictionalised in Godwin's depiction of Caleb's flight and his inability to escape Falkland's surveillance: "The body as the major target of penal repression disappeared [to be replaced by] the development of a knowledge of the individuals."<sup>31</sup>

Bentham states in the passage quoted above that “the liberties of a country real or pretended are maintained [...] by men whose glory it is to be known, by the general concurrence of *all ranks*” [italics mine]. But as his argument develops, a striking class dimension becomes apparent to Bentham’s descriptions of the criminality that his suggested system might prevent: his proposal is founded upon the primarily political understanding of anonymity that E.P. Thompson has placed at the heart of eighteenth-century studies of crime. “In England,” Bentham states, “where the general laxity of the law gives a particular degree of malignity to most of the diseases of the body politic, every body knows but too well to what a degree the higher and middling classes of the people are exposed to the outrages of the lower, who if they can but maintain a superiority for the instant have nothing to apprehend for the future, conscious of being unknown and deriving security from their meanness.”<sup>32</sup> Bentham here replicates the class logic of Lord Hardwicke’s radical 1736 extension to the Black Act, in which he directed a jury that “appearing in the high road with faces blacked, and being otherwise disguised” was “a single crime” and thus fell under the Act’s remit.<sup>33</sup> This logic, however, which was being applied to turnpike rioters, was never applied to more genteel practitioners of anonymity or disguise. As Thompson notes, “it is by no means the case that anonymity was the refuge of the poor alone.” To the examples he provides of letters petitioning for favours or advancing proposals for the public good, we might add the phenomena of masquerade or blanked names in newspapers, which were apparently viewed as more ludic than threatening, and certainly not a matter for prosecution. Although in Thompson’s words, “the free-born Englishman crept about in a mask and folded in a Guy Fawkes cloak,” only plebeian anonymity was punishable.<sup>34</sup>

Both “blacking” and “blackmail,” then, are overwhelmingly seen by Bentham – as by eighteenth-century British law – as an offence against property.<sup>35</sup> Not only is anonymity styled the refuge of those who have offended, but those who have offended are explicitly conceptualized as

members of the "lower" orders. Anonymity is not only the enemy of law enforcement; it is also styled as the refuge of those who do not have the importance or social status to control the circulation of their proper names – those who are not "men whose glory it is to be known."

Since it is related from the perspective of one of the "lower orders," one might expect *Caleb Williams* to provide a direct antithesis of Bentham's critique of anonymity. It puts forward no direct proposal, however, but instead offers a series of undulating expressions of confidence – or scepticism – in various different modes and models of naming. The complex manner in which the narrative tempo of *Caleb Williams* responds to pivotal moments at which names are exposed, modified or concealed – both orally and legibly – suggests that Godwin is concerned with exploring the potential of both forms of naming to confine and to liberate. This very vacillation is telling, I think, since it demonstrates unease about a range of different contexts for the circulation of the individual name, which can be read as a contribution to a wider critique of the political uses to which mechanisms of onomastic individualization can be put.

The tension between oral and legible transmissions of the personal name is a key feature of my argument here, and one that I think is enabled by my attempt to answer an historical question by means of a literary text. Perhaps because of the fact that the dominant disciplines in the field of surveillance studies – history and sociology – largely rely on written records, the work available on this subject largely addresses the *written* name's ability to perform either an alienating or a confirming function. While literary studies of course face the same problem as any other discipline in that oral evidence from the eighteenth century is only accessible through a legible medium, the novel does have the advantage over other forms that it attempts to preserve, in a broadly mimetic manner, representations of oral culture. The instances of naming within Godwin's novel, which are as frequently oral as they are written, can be used to interrogate the relationship of legible and oral cultures to onomastic identity.



As narrator, Caleb's responses to different forms of his name might be thought of as expressive of a cultural response to the transition between two stages; Groebner's "prehistory of the wanted poster and the pass"<sup>36</sup> and James Scott's "legible people – a people open to the scrutiny of officialdom,"<sup>37</sup> which depends more on governmental ability to record information about all its citizens; a movement from "reading off" the body to "reading on" to it. Historians of surveillance studies have frequently highlighted the late eighteenth century as a crucial epoch in Europe for this transition. In the words of Jane Caplan and John Torbey, "it was the epoch of political development inaugurated by the French Revolution's creation of a specifically national citizenship that stimulated the spread of both the resources and the need to subject entire populations to large-scale documentary inventories, and hence the adoption of elaborate systems for tracking and verifying individual identities."<sup>38</sup>

While surveillance studies theorists have been vocal about the tension between the "emancipatory and the repressive aspects of identity documentation,"<sup>39</sup> with Caplan in particular having addressed "the personal name as a component in the apparatus of identification in nineteenth-century France, Germany and England,"<sup>40</sup> the chronological coherence of sociological theory around practices of documenting identity remains, by the admission of leaders in the field, patchy.<sup>41</sup> Late eighteenth-century Britain is one of the most notable omissions in an area of scholarship that lavishes attention upon early modern and twentieth-century British surveillance practices but has restricted attention to other parts of Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly France. Perhaps one of the reasons for this omission is that the permissiveness of British law in the eighteenth century as regards onomastic issues can initially appear to suggest that there is somehow less to say about the personal name's relationship to state surveillance in late eighteenth-century Britain than in other European states. Caplan summarizes the difference thus:

[...] the ambiguities and silences of English name law offer a striking contrast to the French and German states' claims to a primary interest in their citizens' names. Suffice it to say that the English state has had no effective control over or stake in the stabilization of the personal name, which has long been regarded as a matter of common law. As an English contemporary of Gierke put it in 1878, "The law of surnames may be concisely stated: there is none at all" [...]. The silence of English law on the matter of names is consonant with a governmental system in which registration and identity cards have not normally been part of the apparatus of administration.<sup>42</sup>

It has perhaps been seen as easier to conceptualize the personal name as the bearer of political weight when writing about 1790s France, where legislative prescription of names was a key feature of the revolutionary regime. The Act of 6 Fructidor II forbade citizens from adopting any name other than the one recorded at their birth, and the law of 11 Germinal, Year XI, imposed fixed patronyms and established national regulations for the choice of forename and the transmission of the family name, following an earlier flourishing of voluntary re-naming activity among fervent Republicans who chose to express their revolutionary credentials by a change of name.<sup>43</sup> Faced with this clear legislative prescription, it is perhaps easier for social historians to consider the political importance of the personal name in France than to consider its cultural weight and mediation in Britain, where the law is silent on the issue of naming.<sup>44</sup>

It is, however, precisely this legal silence that enables the British individual to speak up; it is this statutory laxity that facilitates the richness of onomastic self-stylings that can be observed across a variety of British literature of the 1780s and 1790s. The fact that British political administrations of the late eighteenth century, unlike their French counterparts, never acted to regulate the naming process does

not mean that British thinkers of the era – who constantly had one eye across the Channel – were not constantly considering what the implications might be if it did so. Neither does it mean that both literature and historical records do not contain multiple examples of the personal name's potential, both as collected or withheld data and as meaningful choice, to act as a site of struggle between the state and its individual subjects.

An initial reading of *Caleb Williams*, written as French legislators were in the process of codifying onomastic regulations, might seem to suggest that incidences of print dissemination of the personal name symbolize the repressive treatment of the individual by the state. Within the Russian-doll narrative of the steward Collins, the introduction of various performative written documents in which a name is demanded or included signify disaster. These include the refusal of the freeholder Hawkins to write his name in a poll book,<sup>45</sup> the writ against Emily Melville,<sup>46</sup> and a letter to Barnabas Tyrrell banning him from the local assembly.<sup>47</sup> Over the course of Caleb's own narrative, it is the "printed paper [...] as good as a bank note of a hundred guineas" picked up by the robber Wilson that first marks the state dissemination of Caleb's personal name as linked to the "description of a felon."<sup>48</sup> Upon arrival in London, encountering a new and improved version of the hand bill by the cries of the hawker, Caleb steels himself to buy a copy, "resolved to know the exact state of the fact, and what I had to depend upon" – in short, to find out who Caleb Williams actually is. "I was equalled," he discovers upon reading it, "to the most notorious house-breaker in the art of penetrating through walls and doors, and to the most accomplished swindler in plausibleness, duplicity and disguise." This discovery plunges Caleb into despair: the paper, he complains, is "the consummation of my misfortune," and its existence radically re-draws the aspect of the urban environment in which he hoped to find anonymity and succour: "A numerous class of individuals, through every department, almost every house of the metropolis, would be induced to look with a suspicious eye upon every stranger, especially every solitary stranger, that fell under

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their observation... It was no longer Bow-Street, it was a million of men, in arms against me."<sup>49</sup>

Pamela Clemit has pointed out that this particular incident "alludes directly to the distribution of defamatory chapbooks and handbills by loyalist associations in an effort to silence radical agitation. While writing Volume III [of *Caleb Williams*], Godwin published an open letter to John Reeves, founder in 1792 of the government-funded Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, in which he protested the use of such methods against Paine":

I was myself present at the trial of this man. We all know by what means a verdict was procured: by repeated proclamations, by all the force, and all the fears of the kingdom being artfully turned against one man. As I came out of court, I saw hand-bills, in the most vulgar and illiberal style distributed, entitled, The Confessions of Thomas Paine. I had not walked three streets, before I was encountered by ballad singers, roaring in cadence rude, a miserable set of scurrilous stanzas upon his private life.<sup>50</sup>

As Clemit also points out, further strengthening the case for a link between legibility and state repression, "It is the wide circulation of the pamphlet that destroys Caleb's last refuge in Wales and makes him determined to denounce Falkland." Perplexed by the sudden coldness of his new neighbors, Caleb learns that a group of traveling bricklayers have brought into the vicinity "the very paper of the Wonderful and Surprising History of Caleb Williams, the discovery of which towards the close of my residence in London had produced in me such exquisite pain. This discovery at once cleared up all the mystery that had hung upon my late transactions. Abhorred and intolerable certainty succeeded to the doubts which had haunted my mind. It struck me with the rapidity and irresistible effect of lightning. I was like a man blasted, his head bare and exposed to the fury of the elements."<sup>51</sup> Caleb's choice of simile once again recalls sartorial insufficiency, linking his chosen alias to a

protective garment which, once whipped away, exposes him to lightening-like devastation, which is, of course, conducted by the written text. Caleb's description of this item as "the detested scroll"<sup>52</sup> might serve as a general description of the bureaucratically authorized and disseminated manifestation of the personal name; and print is undoubtedly its medium, literacy the vehicle through which it is disseminated.

As I noted briefly at the beginning of this essay, Caleb's response to the state-sanctioned, legible dissemination of his name has a marked contrast earlier in Godwin's narrative. In a "little public house at the extremity of a village," Caleb overhears "three or four labourers, the gentry of a village alehouse... fall almost immediately into conversation about my history, whom with a slight variation of circumstances they styled the notorious housebreaker, Kit Williams." News of 'Kit's exploits has reached these pub philosophers through exclusively oral means: "Damn the fellow, said one of them, one never hears of any thing else. O' my life, I think he makes talk for the whole county."

Observe the difference, in this case, of Caleb's response to the mention of his name. Seized with "extreme [...] terrors" at first, he "trembled as if in an ague fit; and at first felt continual impulses to quit the house and take to my heels. I drew closer in my corner, held aside my head, and seemed from time to time to undergo a total revolution of the animal economy." However, ultimately "the tide of ideas turned. Perceiving they paid no attention to me [...] I began to be amused at the absurdity of their tales, and the variety of the falsehoods I heard asserted around me. My soul seemed to expand; I felt a pride in the self-possession and lightness of heart with which I could listen to the scene; and I determined to prolong and heighten the enjoyment." This prolongation takes the form of actively approaching the hostess of the tavern, and asking her "what sort of man this Kit Williams might be?" The obliging wench replies, to Caleb's delight, "that, as she was informed, he was as handsome, likely a lad, as any in four counties round; and that she loved him for his cleverness, by which he outwitted

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all the keepers they could set over him, and made his way through stone walls, as if they were so many cobwebs... she said she hoped he was far enough away by this time, but, if not, she wished the curse of God might light on them that betrayed so noble a fellow to a fatal end! – Though she little thought that the person of whom she spoke was so near her, yet the sincere and generous warmth with which she interested herself in my behalf, gave me considerable pleasure.”<sup>53</sup>

Here, the orally transmitted name opens up possibilities of plurality which result in the expansion of Caleb’s sense of personal identity. The vulgar populace creates a mutation of Caleb’s given name in the familiar abbreviation “Kit,” which, as Stephen Wilson has pointed out in his broad social history of nicknames, might either act as a hostile “form of community control”<sup>54</sup> or “signal membership of a friendship group.”<sup>55</sup> Caleb’s successive emotional reactions might be said to reflect both these possibilities, with eventual emphasis on the latter. In either case, both the nickname and the conversation open up a series of interpretations of Caleb’s conduct that stand in solid opposition to the monolithic state-sanctioned version of his narrative. One of these versions is a pretty exact replication of Caleb’s own take on the truth: “when two squires lay their heads together, they do not much matter law, you know; or else they twist the law to their own ends, I cannot say exactly which; but it is much at one, when the poor fellow’s breath is out of his body.” Others are less sympathetic. The crucial point is that no account “pass[es] unquestioned. Each man maintained the justness of his own statement, and the dispute was long and obstinately pursued.” I read these pluralities, of name and narrative, as the instigating forces behind the expansion of identity experienced by Caleb.

It would be overly simplistic, however, to use these two scenes to attempt to argue that oral culture is aligned with emancipatory expansion of identities, while written culture represses a disciplinary meta-narrative and thus entrenches social injustice. The transitional stage between a visual and legible society in which Caleb’s perambulations take place means that the precincts of orality and literacy overlap, an example of

which overlapping we have seen already in the portrayal of the cries and the wares of the hawker. In fact, when it comes to Caleb's own ownership and dissemination of his own name, it could be argued that some of his oral admissions in fact steer him further into the grip of the law. I have already noted the moment at which Caleb gives himself up to Jones, not by "taking off his face" but by announcing his name. Similarly, the incident whereby Caleb nearly eludes his bounty hunting captors by gaining the favour of an old man set to guard him is plunged into quite a different course by Caleb's determination truthfully to pronounce his own name when faced with the old man's desire "to be faithfully informed in some degree respecting the person he was asked to oblige." The old man's "complexion alter[s] at the repetition of" the word "Williams." He demands a Christian name, which Caleb provides in turn. The old man conjures him "by every thing that was sacred to answer him faithfully to one question more. I was not? – no, it was impossible – the person who had formerly lived servant with Mr Falkland of – ?" Caleb confirms the fact. His fate is sealed, his escape route blocked. "He was sorry that fortune had been so unpropitious to him, as for him ever to have set eyes upon me! I was a monster with whom the very earth groaned!"<sup>56</sup> Orality has acted, in this case, to reinforce the incarceration that was originally the result of the circulation of written forms.

Similarly, it could be argued that one particular instance of legible self-naming – namely Caleb's published version of his own narrative – is depicted as the sole moment whereby he attains authority over his own identity. He rejects, eventually, the oral pluralities that offered him a temporary escape: "I had gained fame indeed, the miserable fame to have my story bawled forth by hawkers and ballad mongers, to have my praises as an active and surprising villain celebrated among footmen and chambermaids; but I was neither an Erostratus nor an Alexander, to die contented with that species of eulogium."<sup>57</sup> Another species of eulogium is required, and Caleb finds it in the declaration: "I will use no daggers! I will unfold a tale – !"<sup>58</sup> The pen is likened to the dagger, instrument of

assassination. "With this engine, this little pen I defeat all his machinations; I stab him in the very point he was most solicitous to defend!"<sup>59</sup> Caleb's final lines, though by this point he is professing repentance in addressing Falkland thus, are a rejection of orality and endorsement of written culture as the vehicle by which truth may best be conveyed: "I began these memoirs with the idea of vindicating my own character. I have now no character that I wish to vindicate: but I will finish them that thy story may be fully understood; and that, if those errors of thy life be known which thou so ardently desiredst to conceal, the world may at least not hear and repeat a half-told and mangled tale."<sup>60</sup>

The proliferation of print media creates the conditions under which Caleb's name can be repeated, publicized and disseminated "by one of his majesty's most principal secretaries of state" in the interests of detaining and restricting him; yet Caleb's own construction of identity is also conveyed through the form of print – the novel that bears his name on the title page. Caleb's eventual determination to publish and therefore to control the print circulation of his name can be seen as a defiant riposte to the potentially repressive written and oral circulation of his name conducted by other agents. His switching of forms can be read as an endorsement of the potential of the novel to combat the bureaucratic written forms by which the propertied class, and the state mechanisms that serve it, seek to repress and discipline those lower classes. The challenge to bureaucratic data collection may lie in fiction, as suggested by Godwin's cancelled 1794 Preface to *Caleb Williams*, where Godwin argues that the novel is the appropriate "vehicle" to teach a "valuable lesson" about the intrusion of "the spirit and character of the government [...] into every rank of society" without "subtracting from the interest and passion by which a performance of this sort ought to be characterised."<sup>61</sup>

I am not sure, however, that this argument really holds up, given the oft-noted ambiguity of Godwin's chosen ending. After all, Caleb finds himself destitute of any "character" to preserve when he advertises his name in written form; his ability to broadcast his personal name has ended up backfiring just as badly as his ability to control his visual



appearance. In fact, Caleb's eventual victory (in the published ending, at least) in the battle of reputations that Philp argues is enacted by Falkland and Caleb, is the fundamental respect in which he ultimately displays his inadequacy as a protagonist. Despite originally being content to labour in obscurity, Caleb gradually emulates and appropriates Falkland's "mad and misguided love of fame,"<sup>62</sup> his obsessive desire for a "spotless and illustrious name,"<sup>63</sup> his worship of reputation as "the idol, the jewel of my life."<sup>64</sup> "My good name shall never be your victim!" he rages,<sup>65</sup> and by the time of his final showdown with Falkland he explicitly frames the two names as being in a relationship of symmetrical balance: "What is it that you require of me? That I should sign away my own reputation for the better maintaining of yours. Where is the equality of that?"<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, I read Caleb's wretchedness at the end of the novel as a symptom of his degraded state in coming to occupy the same reputation-fetishistic ground as his former master.

Critics have long realized that a primary concern in *Caleb Williams* is the tension between the individual and the wider society around him, and have come to diverse conclusions about Godwin's view on the ethics of atomization and assimilation. Gregory Dart has argued that "in Godwin's mind [...] the moral cost of collaboration was always greater than its supposed material benefits. According to this view of things, cooperation compromised and degraded the workings of individual reason by undermining the principle of intellectual independence."<sup>67</sup> This hardening certainty on Godwin's part throughout the 1790s – clearer, Dart contends, in every edition of *Political Justice* – culminates in a refusal to sanction any form of political collaboration or association. Eric Daffron, on the other hand, sees Caleb Williams as illustrative that "imitative sympathy is a particular strategy with both dominant and resistant tactical uses,"<sup>68</sup> and, if anything, veers toward emphasizing the futility of existence, in Godwin's view, without social bonds. Daffron points out that Caleb is made to state that whereas "the pride of philosophy has taught us to treat man as an individual, [he is] no such thing, he holds necessarily, indispensably, to his species."

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Daffron reads Caleb without social sympathy as inscribed with "the absence of self," and as appropriately self-styled, in the unpublished ending, as a gravestone.

I want to encourage a new perspective on this question by examining Godwin's engagement with the ethics of assimilation and atomization through an onomastic lens. I read the published ending of *Caleb Williams* – in particular the extent to which both oral and written transmissions of naming drive Caleb to take refuge on the same reputation-centric ground as Falkland – as expressing scepticism in the very notion of onomastic atomization itself. Distinguishing signs of individuality must, whether driven by oral or written means, ultimately lead to the fetishization of reputation, which is ultimately destructive. According to this reading, Godwin differs sharply from Bentham, who sees one of the principal advantages of his proposal as the fact it would confirm and officialize individuality, enabling people to exercise ownership of their own "name" in the reputational sense.

According to the present system of things it unfortunately happens that many thousands of persons shall be in many instances called by the same name. This is the case more or less in every country in Europe. It is evident that this could not have been otherwise without the interference of authority. The circumstances that recommended a name to one man would recommend it to another. Hence a multitude of inconveniences are continually arising. The infamy or the honour, the profit or the loss, the trouble or the inconvenience which belongs to John is bestowed upon another John to whom it is as little due as it is to Peter.<sup>69</sup>

Where Godwin and Bentham coincide, though they approach the issue from different perspectives, is that they both roughly align contemporary forms of onomastic circulation as advantageous to the propertied classes, whose "glory it is to be known," and open up the possibility – though it is treated by Bentham with trepidation and

Godwin with ambivalence – that obscurity might benefit those of the lower classes. Again, in making this contention I take into account the material aspect of “reputation.” From the circulation of writs, poll books, and personal correspondence, to the commission of libellous handbills, to the ability to stand physically apart and speak names from a magisterial perspective at legal proceedings, men such as Falkland and his relative Forrester are able to produce and pronounce the personal name in such a way as to preserve and destroy reputations. Caleb operates from a position of significant disadvantage, with his literary production the only way authoritatively to control his name’s dissemination.

It is highly unlikely that Godwin actually read Bentham’s essay before or while he wrote *Caleb Williams*. Although Godwin’s diaries record that he did meet Bentham a number of times, the first relevant occurrence (an unsuccessful attempt to call on him) takes place in 1814. In 1817 Godwin wrote a letter to his friend Francis Place, upon his discovery that Place was staying with Bentham: “I hope that the pleasures of the country, and the delight of Mr. Bentham’s conversation (which, I assure you, I envy you, and have been twenty years trying to obtain) will not make you forget the good inclination I have often seen in you, to render yourself useful to another.”<sup>70</sup> In addition, Bentham’s *Indirect Legislation* was first published (in French, by the Swiss scholar and reformer Etienne Dumont, in significantly abridged and altered form) only in 1802. While Godwin had not met Bentham in the early 1790s when he was writing *Caleb Williams*, he read Bentham’s published work and may have known by repute other of his ideas than those published; however, there is no reason to suspect any actual familiarity with his work on naming.<sup>71</sup>

“Indirect Legislation” and *Caleb Williams* should, therefore, be read as expressions of two common cultural anxieties rather than any kind of dialogue. The first of these anxieties concerns the question of what ethics, if any, should be attached to the recording, possession, and dissemination of the name as data; as an arbitrary identificatory mechanism that links this physical body to that action. The second, given

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the realization that the personal name is an evocative entity inextricably linked to senses of personal and collective identity, is what rights are held by both the name-bearing individual and the government of which the individual is a subject to determine exactly what that name should be. These questions are undeniably distinct, but they overlap in both Bentham's and Godwin's texts, and the problematic consequences of this common overlap is a key feature of the ethical questions that arise in the modern fields of both onomastics and surveillance studies. Bentham's proposal conflates the right of government to control the retention and circulation of an individual's personal name with the right of that same government to determine what that name will be; one without the other is construed as useless for the purposes of subduing an unruly population. Godwin's portrayal of Caleb's psychological undulations seems to gesture toward the potential for liberty in pluralities of naming – both in circulation and composition – while simultaneously the gloomy logic of the narrative necessarily reduces each particular instance to a moment of political repression. In both cases, they consider the benefits and disadvantages of the atomized and assimilated identities that certain kinds of names connote and create.

I would like to conclude this essay by suggesting that these observations are most instructive when viewed in context of several historical incidents or accidents which also consider atomization and assimilation as processes enabled by onomastic choice. These incidents point toward the struggle over onomastic control as a key feature of the conflict between William Pitt's administration of the early 1790s and the radical groups that sought to bring about democratic reform, the most important of which was the London Corresponding Society (LCS). Leading members of the LCS were known to both Godwin and Bentham (Francis Place, for example, was a mutual friend in the early years of the nineteenth century), and to read the surviving evidence of their engagement with the issue of what a radical man should call himself is to situate Godwin and Bentham's writings in a network of practices and arguments that had real impact on people's lives; arrest, imprisonment, financial penalty, transportation.

In January 1794 Maurice Margarot, Chairman of the General Committee of the LCS, was charged with sedition and put on trial in Edinburgh. The transcript of the trial, which was in all likelihood a stitch-up by the Home Secretary Henry Dundas (his nephew took a leading role in the prosecution), displays a marked preoccupation with the meaning of certain key terms used by the LCS. Indeed, a key feature of the prosecution's case was that Margarot and his fellow defendants called one another "Citizen" – which, as Mary Thale has pointed out, in the prosecutor's view signified a desire for revolution. "The very name they assumed," he declaimed, "every thing verbal or written, demonstrated to my mind, demonstrated to Scotland, demonstrated to England, and to the Empire at large, that they were a set of French Conventionists."<sup>72</sup> Margarot refuted the charge spiritedly, arguing, "By the word Citizen I mean a free man; a man enjoying all the rights and all the privileges, and paying his quota towards all the expence of Society."<sup>73</sup> The title, he pointed out, was already in wide circulation within both England and Scotland: "there is not a writ for the return of a Member of Parliament, but has the word Citizen in it: the word Citizen is in all the students cards; and even the Pinmakers of London, are obliged to have the word Citizen in their cards; therefore it is not an adoption of any thing new."<sup>74</sup> But the prosecution, while professing that he used the term himself "in a fair and legal sense" and admitting that "the term citizen, taken by itself, is an innocent and a proper term," maintained that there was also a sense in which the title could be adopted unpatriotically, even seditiously: "this man has been guilty of apeing and imitating the French Convention, was acting upon that model and that principle [...] it is a proof of the animus and the intent of the persons concerned in that meeting, that they took for themselves the model and example of the present Convention of France, imitating it in every way in their power."<sup>75</sup> Margarot was found guilty by the jury and sentenced to fourteen years' transportation.

Margarot had been pushing for the adoption of the term "Citizen" at LCS meetings since 1793 (at least once facing staunch opposition,<sup>76</sup>) and

his ultimate martyrdom to the title should be read as both the onomastic component of a broader trend among radical movements of what Jon Mee has called "a kind of self-fashioning,"<sup>77</sup> and as evidence of governmental sensitivity to and ruthless dealing with such forms of onomastic innovation. Neither was Margarot the only senior figure in the LCS to participate in such self-fashioning activity. Mee, for example, is referring to the religious, patriotic and radical personae of the radical poet and pamphleteer Richard "Citizen" Lee, another member of the LCS, who was arrested in 1795 for publishing seditious pamphlets including the notorious "King Killing." As Mee demonstrates, 1795 saw Lee's transformation both onomastically and politically: 1795, according to Mee, was the year in which Lee was "transformed from an anonymous "friend to the distressed patriots," as he signed his poem to Mrs Hardy, into "Citizen" Lee, the purveyor of the most flagrantly seditious poetry in London."<sup>78</sup>

A year and a half after Margarot's trial, and mid-way through "Citizen" Lee's year of notoriety, an incident took place at Charing Cross that neatly highlights the potential of performative naming processes to cross the boundary between the realms of semantic and physical discipline. A riot broke out on 14 July 1795 and Colonel Edward Marcus Despard, ex-superintendent of British Honduras and member of the LCS, was observing proceedings. Approached by a constable and asked his name, he gave it, according to the *True Briton*, as "CITIZEN EDWARD MARCUS DESPARD." He was accordingly arrested, and examined on a charge of "being found among the Rioters." While the charge against Despard was not explicitly related to his naming himself as "Citizen" (no such charge, of course, existed), the *True Briton* makes it clear in its reportage that Despard's self-styling was the reason for both his arrest and the close interrogation he was subjected to by the magistrate. "MR. BOND observed, that under the very improper title Col. Despard had in the outset assumed, it was but proper to investigate every circumstance relative to him.... As it did not appear he was concerned in the riot, his abstaining from the assumption of the name *Citizen* would have

considerably abridged his examination.”<sup>79</sup> It appears that all concerned admitted that Despard had not contravened the law as regards the charge brought against him; it was his determination to name himself in a manner that clearly signalled sympathy with the French revolutionary cause that caused umbrage.

I am aware that, in bringing these examples to the fore, I have made a leap from discussing personal names that are patrimonially or baptismally bestowed, to discussing titles that are collective categories subject to a thoroughly different historical lineage and set of significations. I am not blind to the difference between personal names and titles, though both give an historian substantial leverage to pry apart knots of identity. These two forms of naming might be seen as expressive of Dror Wahrman’s pithy summary of the problem with defining “identity” in general:

Identity, as has often been noted, encompasses within it – in its etymology as well as in its common application for the variety of possible responses to the question “who am I” – a productive tension between two contradictory impulses: identity as the unique individuality of a person (as in “identity card”), or identity as a common denominator that places an individual within a group (as in “identity politics”). In the former sense, sometimes akin to self-identity is the essence of difference: it is what guarantees my quintessential specificity in relation to others. In the latter sense, identity is the obverse, or erasure of difference: it is what allows me to ignore particular differences as I recognise myself in a collective grouping.<sup>80</sup>

I do not, however, think that one can draw the distinction between names and titles quite as easily as to render my provided instances unmeaningful. As John Barrell has pointed out, Lee in fact adopted the word “Citizen” as a given name, replacing “Richard.” Barrell also draws

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attention to James Kennedy's poem "Treason!!! Or, Not Treason!!!" in which several stanzas are addressed to the poet's children Citizen and Margaret (potentially a play on Margarot, who is celebrated elsewhere in the poem.)<sup>81</sup> In the eighteenth century, different regional and class naming practices made Christian names, surnames, titles, place names and professional titles overlap in different ways; not necessarily ways that would make life easiest for modern onomastic scholars.<sup>82</sup> I would argue that in this particular case, the slippage between personal names, and titles can be read as symbolic of a psychological slippage that I have already noted; that between atomization and assimilation. Though individual members of the LCS were sometimes also men of property, the foremost of their political demands was for universal suffrage and an end to the property requirement. When we see LCS members staking their right to be known as "Citizen" – either alongside or in place of their previously held personal names – we can read off their choices a desire to be part of a collective onomastic identity; to reject individualistic atomization and to appropriate the very collective anonymity that caused Bentham such distress.

In his reading of *Caleb Williams*, James Thompson has argued that "the opposition of psychological states and political conditions is not one which Godwin would have accepted, for he argues in both his philosophy and his fiction that psychological states are determined by political conditions."<sup>83</sup> Psychology and politics are intrinsically linked in Bentham's proposal for the state-enforced regulation of onomastic individuality, in Godwin's vacillation of confidence between anonymity and publication of both oral and legible modes of naming, and in the gradual determination of the LCS to abandon social distinctions and assimilate themselves into a collective group of "Citizens." These three types of discourse provide insights, from different generic angles, into the same cultural tendency; a burgeoning consciousness of the psychological – and therefore, to follow Thompson, the political – importance of personal naming in the late eighteenth century. John Barrell has rightly pointed out that "the notion that the political conflict



of the period was to be regarded as a conflict, among other things, about the meanings of words, was a theme of numerous liberal or radical texts of the 1790s.”<sup>84</sup> Godwin, Bentham and the self-fashionings of Margarot, Lee, and Despard make compelling cases for the extension of this semantic franchise into the territory of personal proper names.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 260.

<sup>2</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 228-30.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Caplan, “‘This or That Particular Person’: Protocols of Identification in Nineteenth-Century Europe,” in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, ed. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 65.

<sup>4</sup> University College London collection of Bentham manuscripts (henceforth UC) lxxxvii, 9.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Ian Ousby “‘My Servant Caleb’: Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* and the Political Trials of the 1790s,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 44 (1974), 47-55; Mark Philp, “Caleb Williams and the Treason Trials,” in *Godwin’s Political Justice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 103-19; James Thompson, “Surveillance in Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*,” in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 173-98, all of which have informed my argument.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, “Surveillance in *Caleb Williams*,” 192.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 191.

<sup>8</sup> Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice*, 108.

<sup>9</sup> UC lxxxvii, 1.

<sup>10</sup> UC lxxxvii, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Valentin Groebner, “Describing the Person, Reading the Signs in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe: Identity Papers, Vested Figures,

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and the Limits of Identification, 1400-1600," in Caplan and Torpey, *Documenting Individual Identity*, 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> UC lxxxvii, 4.

<sup>13</sup> UC lxxxvii, 5.

<sup>14</sup> UC lxxxvii, 7.

<sup>15</sup> UC lxxxvii, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 245, 226.

<sup>17</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 261.

<sup>18</sup> UC lxxxvii, 4.

<sup>19</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 22. See also Thompson's account of Lord Hardwicke's 1736 verdict in which he directed the jury that "appearing in the high road with faces blacked, and being otherwise disguised" was "a single crime," *Whigs and Hunters*, 250.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald to Godwin, [1794], Bod. [Abinger] Dep. C. 509, cited in Clemit's Introduction to *Caleb Williams*, viii.

<sup>21</sup> Groebner, "Describing the Person," 25.

<sup>22</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 261.

<sup>23</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 230.

<sup>24</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 234-35.

<sup>25</sup> UC lxxxvii, 8.

<sup>26</sup> UC lxxxvii, 12.

<sup>27</sup> UC lxxxvii, 13.

<sup>28</sup> UC lxxxvii, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Jane Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), xi. For more detailed arguments that at the end of the eighteenth century tattoos functioned to symbolize a variety of types of difference, alienation, or criminality, see Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford, 1993), cited in Juliet Fleming "The Renaissance Tattoo," in Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body*, 67; and Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-century British Perceptions of the South Pacific," in Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body*, 100-101.

<sup>30</sup> UC lxxxvii, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 8, 125.

<sup>32</sup> UC lxxxvii, 15.

<sup>33</sup> E.P. Thompson, "The Crime of Anonymity," in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E.P. Thompson, Cal Winslow (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 250.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, "The Crime of Anonymity," 272.

<sup>35</sup> Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*, 207.

<sup>36</sup> Groebner, "Describing the Person," 16.

<sup>37</sup> Caplan and Torbey, *Documenting Individual Identity*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Caplan and Torpey, *Documenting Individual Identity*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Caplan and Torbey, *Documenting Individual Identity*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Caplan, "This or That Particular Person," 50.

<sup>41</sup> Caplan and Torpey, *Documenting Individual Identity*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Caplan, "This or That Particular Person," 63-65.

<sup>43</sup> For an introduction to this practice, see Stephen Wilson, *The means of naming: A social and cultural history of personal naming in Western Europe*, (London: UCL Press, 1998), 208-9.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Gerard Noiriel, "The Identification of the Citizen: The Birth of Republican Civil Status in France," in Caplan and Torpey, eds., *Documenting Individual Identity*.

<sup>45</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 36.

<sup>46</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 81.

<sup>47</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 90.

<sup>48</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 214-15.

<sup>49</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 258-59.

<sup>50</sup> Clemit, Introduction, in Godwin *Caleb Williams*, xiii.

<sup>51</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 281.

<sup>52</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 283.

<sup>53</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 228-30.

<sup>54</sup> Wilson, *The means of naming*, 283.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson, *The means of naming*, 287.

Sophie Coulombeau, "Godwin, Bentham, and the London Corresponding Society"

<sup>56</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 241.

<sup>57</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 262.

<sup>58</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 291.

<sup>59</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 292.

<sup>60</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 303.

<sup>61</sup> "Appendix B : The 1794 Preface to *Caleb Williams*," in Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 312.

<sup>62</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 270.

<sup>63</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 132.

<sup>64</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 99.

<sup>65</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 132.

<sup>66</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 271.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 86.

<sup>68</sup> Daffron, Eric, "'Magnetical sympathy': strategies of power and resistance in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*," *Criticism*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (22 March 1995): 213-20. Literature Online. URL: [http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/openurl/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res\\_ver=0.2&r\\_es\\_id=xri:lion&rft\\_id=xri:lion:rec:abell:R01594434](http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/openurl/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&r_es_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:rec:abell:R01594434)

<sup>69</sup> UC lxxxvii, 13.

<sup>70</sup> 61, Godwin-Place Correspondence, British Library. Cited in *William Godwin's Diary: Reconstructing a Social and Political Culture*, <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/people/BEN02.html#BEN02-notes>.

<sup>71</sup> I am extremely grateful to Dr. Tim Causer and Dr. Michael Quinn, research associates at the Bentham Project based at University College London, for helping me to clarify the bibliographic history of Bentham's proposal on marks of personal identity.

<sup>72</sup> Ramsey, *The Trial of Maurice Margarot, before the High Court of Judiciary, at Edinburgh, on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of January, 1794, on an Indictment for Seditious Practices* (London; New York: James Carey), 85.

<sup>73</sup> Ramsey, *The Trial of Maurice Margarot*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> Ramsey, *The Trial of Maurice Margarot*, 130.

<sup>75</sup> Ramsey, *The Trial of Maurice Margarot*, 97.

<sup>76</sup> From “Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society,” ed. Mary Thale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Journal: LCS General Committee, 11 July-22 August 1793.

<sup>77</sup> Mee, “The strange career of Richard ‘Citizen’ Lee: poetry, popular radicalism and enthusiasm in the 1790s,” in *British Literary Radicalism, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, ed. Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 163.

<sup>78</sup> Mee, “The Strange Career of Richard ‘Citizen’ Lee,” 156-57.

<sup>79</sup> *The True Briton*, 15 July 1795. Also, see Barrell’s account of this incident in *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>80</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004), xii.

<sup>81</sup> James Kennedy, *Treason!!! Or, Not Treason!!! Alias, The Weaver’s Budget* (London: D.I. Eaton, 1795), 8.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Stephen Wilson’s contention that in the mid-eighteenth century “the second name was still absent or unusual among the lower classes in Wales” (Wilson, “The Means of Naming,” 243). Charles Burney Jr. writes in a letter of 1780 of “Mr Urquhart, or Meldrum, as I shall call him, according to the Scotch custom, which speaks of every one by the name of his estate – which indeed is very necessary, where there are 30, or 40 of a name, very near Neighbours – a thing not uncommon in the North.” Charles Burney Jr. to Susan Elizabeth Burney, f.c. July 1780, Osborn Collection, Yale University. Viewed at Burney Centre, McGill University.

<sup>83</sup> Thompson, “Surveillance in Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*,” 177.

<sup>84</sup> John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford; London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

