Though the Romantic-era debate between William Godwin and Thomas Malthus about the limits of social progress seemed to have concluded in the 1820s in something of a stalemate, this conversation has recently been revived, though with a rather peculiar twist.¹ The Romantic-era version of this debate pitted Godwin’s principle of perfectibility against Malthus’s principle of population, with Godwin arguing that social relations could be slowly perfected as legal and political institutions were eliminated and Malthus countering that a key determinant of collective behavior was located in the biological register of “population.” Malthus contended that the register of population was inaccessible to human control or intervention and thus concluded that strong social institutions were, pace Godwin’s claims, necessary in order to reduce human suffering. Malthus’s account of population infuriated many Romantic-era authors. William Hazlitt charged that in An Essay on the Principle of Population, Malthus “vibrat[ed] backwards and forwards with a dexterity of self-contradiction which it is wonderful to behold,” and P. B. Shelley was even more direct, writing that he would “rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to Heaven with [William] Paley and Malthus.”² The debate between Malthus and Godwin helped establish a stark division, one that would persist into the twentieth century, between progressives on the left who argued for a malleable social subject capable of self-improvement and those on the right who argued for biological limits on perfectibility. Karl Marx’s claim in Capital that “the great sensation of [Malthus’s] pamphlet . . . was due solely to the fact that it corresponded to the interests of a particular party” also
encouraged the left to see appeals to purportedly biological facts as ideological illusions that defused efforts to improve social relations.³

Yet beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the present, the political valences associated with the Godwin-Malthus debate underwent an extraordinary doubling and reversal. On the one hand, while “Malthus” continues to serve some on the left as a shorthand for attempts to naturalize class relations, ecologically oriented left-leaning groups discovered in the principle of population a resource for critiquing the institutions of capital. The famous 1972 Club of Rome report on *The Limits of Growth*, for example, argued on Malthusian grounds that the dominant Fordist model of manufacture produced ecological and social crises, and the ecologist Garrett Hardin argued in “The Tragedy of the Commons” that the threat of global human population could be combated only by “relinquishing the freedom to breed.”⁴ This leftist neo-Malthusian emphasis on the natural limits of economic growth encouraged neoliberal economists and journalists to promote even more aggressively “the market” as a mechanism capable of overcoming all apparent limits and—perhaps counterintuitively—to link this neoliberal vision of infinite economic expansion with Godwin’s claims about the possibility of perpetual social improvement.⁵

While Godwin’s *Of Political Justice* continues to be seen as an angry attack on class-based privilege, the right has embraced a neo-Godwinian form of institutional critique in order to cut the purse strings of (for example) public funding for the natural sciences, arguing that academic science is simply one more self-interested institution that ought to be opened up to the market.⁶ A left that grounds its program for human improvement in the biological register of population and a right that appropriates Godwin’s emphasis on institutional critique: We find ourselves in a strange neo-Romantic era, in which the ghosts of Malthus and Godwin have doubled, with the result that each can serve as a tutelary spirit for both the left and the right.

This uncanny resurrection, splitting, and reconfiguration of the debate between Godwin and Malthus presents us with an opportunity to reconsider and reconfigure the role of literary theory and its relationship to social progress. A key development in literary theory in the 1970s was the reevaluation of the institutional status of “literature.” Where earlier humanist critics had presented literature as an institution that provided readers with eternal truths, positive normative models, or occasions for the healthy exercise of the powers of reason and feeling, 1970s critics inspired more by Freud, Marx, and Foucault saw instead a problematic technology of
normativity that socialized readers by encouraging them to adopt social norms that served ideological, rather than rational, ends. These new forms of institutional critique were invariably aligned with the rejection of appeals to a fixed biological nature, neo-Malthusian or otherwise; for these neo-Godwinians, the reader-subject is a malleable substance upon which the institutions of literature inscribed ideological contents. However, when neoliberals have now added their voices to the chorus of critiques of the institutions of literature and the humanities, it is perhaps a good time to revisit the other pole of the Godwin-Malthus debate—the concept of population—for tools that might help us understand better the nature of creative literature and to redeem its critical potentials.

This chapter pursues this task across six sections. These are collectively structured as a narrative of rivalries and romances, and they tell the story of two hidden trysts and their multiple monstrous offspring. I begin by noting that Malthus’s and Godwin’s public antagonism masked a more fundamental compatibility, for both believed that explaining social phenomena meant assuming that individuals are, for all intents and purposes, the same. More specifically, both assumed that population-level analyses could disregard individual differences; for Godwin specifically, this meant assuming that social institutions produced the same effect in many individuals. The second section clarifies that the true rivals of the Malthus-Godwin couple were theorists committed to the principle that the individuals who made up populations differed from one another in innumerable ways and that population-level analyses required a recognition of such differences. The third section emphasizes the implications of these hidden Romantic-era affinities and rivalries for our understanding of twentieth-century literary interpretation, suggesting that accounts of literature as a technology for encouraging normative behavior are direct descendants of the Malthus-Godwin pair. The fourth and fifth sections then consider another hidden, and even more unconventional, coupling, one that brought into intimate proximity the Malthus-Godwin pair and their populationist rivals. The site of this tryst was Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, a text that, like Malthus’s and Godwin’s, continues to have important resonance in our own moment. I account for the continuing relevance of *Frankenstein* in part as a consequence of its interest in helping its readers see the world in terms of a difference-oriented concept of population. Seeing the world in terms of the differential aspects of populations could mean searching for biological explanations of social relations, but it could also mean looking for cultural phenomena in which unlikely and improbable events or behaviors were as important as those closer to the normative
center. As I note in the fifth section, some of Shelley’s first readers—namely, periodical reviewers—demonstrated that this view of the world could be spread even in the form of criticisms of her novel. The sixth section connects these earlier attempts to understand literary dynamics in terms of populations to Franco Moretti’s interest in describing the publishing dynamics of short stories and novels in terms of the “culling” performed by literary markets on literary populations, and I conclude with a discussion (and critique) of recent neoliberal efforts to identify population logic completely with the logic of the market.

Society and Population in the Romantic Era

The political philosophy Godwin developed in the 1793, 1796, and 1798 editions of his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice pursued to its logical conclusion the Enlightenment project of identifying and criticizing those social structures that had cast long shadows of illusion and error. Earlier eighteenth-century Enlightenment authors focused their critique on specific institutions, usually those of “kings and priests” (that is, bad government and false religion). Godwin went further, arguing that the real impediments to enlightenment were not specific institutions but institution itself. Godwin argued that institutions, by their nature, forced individuals to adopt the opinions of others, rather than allowing each to employ his or her own reason. Taking on the opinion of another was the real obstacle to enlightenment and social perfectibility, and Godwin thus opposed all institutions, including those of politics, religion, economy (for example, property), and private life (for example, marriage). However, because he understood himself to be living in an era in which institutions did most of the individual’s thinking for him or her, Godwin did not support the immediate overthrow of institutions. Such a step would lead to chaos, as people sought to grasp the new situation by means of habits of thinking formed not by reason but by now-absent institutions. He advocated instead for the gradual elimination of institutions, a process that would slowly and safely increase the occasions for the exercise of individual reason.

Malthus’s “principle of population” was intended to trump Godwin’s principle of perfectibility not by denying Godwin’s claims about institutions but rather by locating a noninstitutional register of darkness—namely, the dynamics of population—that was inaccessible to the enlightening exercise of reason. Malthus’s concept of population thus emphasized the relative sterility of Godwin’s version of materialism. Godwin argued in the Enquiry Concerning Political Justice that human beings and their social
relations are complicated constellations of the same matter and movement that make up the rest of the universe. Yet this kind of materialism focused on a register of reality so far below that of individual decision making or institutional dynamics that discussions of matter and movement occupied very limited space in Godwin’s long text. Malthus, by contrast, presented a more complex materialism, one that focused not, like Godwin, on the physics of material bodies but rather on an intermediate realm—the realm of population—which lay between Godwin’s realms of bare matter and movement, on the one hand, and individual and institutional dynamics, on the other. Human reason could illuminate facts about population dynamics, such as rates and causes of population increase or decrease. However, these were not properly “human” dynamics, for they applied to all living beings and were, as a consequence, largely inaccessible to human control. Malthus asserted that though population dynamics resulted from individual decisions about when and where to reproduce, one could only make sense of these facts of population by abstracting from individual decisions. In place of Godwin’s materialism, upon which little of the argument in his Enquiry depended, Malthus introduced a more complex materialism that impinged directly upon human affairs and institutions.

Yet Malthus’s introduction of this intermediate materialist realm drew on a pre-Romantic sense of population, one that was already being partially displaced—or at least questioned—at the time An Essay on the Principle of Population was published. As Michel Foucault noted, seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century authors had used population as the opposite of depopulation; that is, population referred to processes by which a “deserted territory was repopulated after a great disaster, be it an epidemic, war, or food shortage.” Since populousness was associated with the polity’s strength and health, population was invariably understood as good. Malthus drew upon this concept of population but simply reversed the valence of increasing population from positive to negative, in the sense that, as Frances Ferguson notes, where earlier authors saw increasing population as intrinsically good, Malthus saw it as a threat. By the mid-to-late eighteenth century, though, population also denoted something quite different, namely, a conceptual framework for discovering new facts about large collections of people, facts that were in turn used to determine where, when, and how to apply regulatory measures such as disease inoculation or fiscal policies. For the French physiocrats, and also for physicians and mathematicians in Britain and France interested in questions of disease management, population—along with related terms such as “generation” (génération) and the “human species” (genre humain)—denoted
not a homogenous mass of individuals that increased or decreased in size but rather a heterogeneous collection of individuals, subgroups of which differed in key respects from one another. The Swiss mathematician Daniel Bernoulli, for example, argued that, given a population (or “generation”) of 13,000 infants, a specific percentage would contract smallpox; a percentage of that subgroup would recover and a percentage would die—and, most significant, these percentages could be changed by means of inoculation. Population thus denoted a heterogeneous object of analysis that changed in accordance with its own natural logic—that is, changed largely of its own accord, whether or not laws and institutions forbade these changes—but that could be nudged in certain directions provided that one located the proper pressure points and thresholds. For example, inoculation policies could be justified by calculating and comparing the percentage of deaths that occurred in a population both with and without smallpox inoculation. As Foucault noted, a population was thus for many late-eighteenth-century authors “a set of elements that, on one side, are immersed within the general regime of living beings and that, on another side, offer a surface on which authoritarian, but reflected and calculated transformations can get a hold” (75). Determining where, precisely, authoritarian state measures could gain purchase was a matter of determining the “constants and regularities even in accidents” and the “modifiable variables” on which these constants and regularities of the population depend (74).

From this perspective, the debate between Godwin and Malthus looks less like a conflict between modern principles of socialization and population and more like a conflict between a modern principle of socialization and a premodern approach to population. Though Malthus, like his contemporaries, emphasized a biological register of reality amenable to quantification, his approach to this register was extraordinarily coarse, for the only number about population that interested Malthus was its rate of increase. His approach was also necessarily coarse, for he focused attention on this biological register primarily in order to produce fear about a population that perpetually threatened to increase beyond bounds. His account of population thus stood in stark contrast to those of his contemporaries who deployed this term as a means for generating new facts intended to assist in the transformation of the biological realities of populations (for example, suggesting measures that would push the current normal curve of smallpox mortality in a specific population toward a better normal curve of smallpox mortality).

Godwin did not seem to recognize this point in Of Population (1820), his rather delayed response to Malthus’s Essay. Instead, Godwin implicitly
accepted Malthus’s concept of population but claimed that the biological register of population did not have the significance that Malthus claimed. Like Malthus, Godwin focused solely on the rate of population increase but contended that Malthus’s claim that populations exponentially increase unless otherwise checked bore no correspondence to the actual facts of population increase and decline. This line of argument seems to grant the importance of determining correctly facts about populations. In fact, though, it brackets progressive materialism from questions of social amelioration. Godwin and Malthus agreed that the only fact of interest about a population was its rate of increase, but Godwin implied that one could simply disregard the entire problematic of population if its rate of increase did not threaten in the way that Malthus had suggested. Godwin’s response thus helped solidify what eventually came to seem like an unbridgeable and politically inflected methodological division between “conservatives” who grounded their arguments in the purportedly fixed biological characteristics of populations and “progressives” who placed their bets on the malleable and perfectible socialization technologies of society.

The Metaphysics of Population

Not only did Malthus’s approach to the concept of population differ from that of contemporaries who understood populations as collections of differences, but so did his goals. Where Malthus sought to ground normative claims about social institutions in biological invariants, his contemporaries employed concepts of population to relativize norms. Foucault stressed that the new approach to population was not disciplinary, if by discipline one understands a socialization technique of the sort that Godwin criticized. Foucault notes that in

the disciplines one started from a norm, and it was in relation to that training carried out with reference to the norm that the normal could be distinguished from the abnormal. Here [i.e., the new sciences of population], instead we have a plotting of the normal and the abnormal, of different curves of normality, and the operation of normalization consists in establishing an interplay between these different distributions of normality and [in] acting to bring the most unfavorable in line with the more favorable.

To return to the example of inoculation, eighteenth-century authors tracked many different normal curves of smallpox, parsed by age, region, town, and occupation, but sought, by means of decisions about which people to inoculate, to nudge some of these normal curves toward other normal curves
judged to be more favorable. This was thus not a matter of socializing or disciplining each individual but rather of identifying and intervening *only* at those points that enabled one to shift one curve toward another.

Foucault’s account helps us think further about what we might call the metaphysical assumptions of the modern concept of population. A “population” in the modern (that is, non-Malthusian) sense was premised on the existence of:

1. a *source* of constant variation;

2. a *malleable collective body* within which those variations emerge, that presents a surface by means of which observers can locate regularities, and that is itself the point of application for human initiatives designed to change those regularities; and

3. forces of selection that traverse the surface and destroy some, but not all, of those variations.

The source of variations can be labeled “nature” or “chance,” or (in the case of cultural phenomena) “desire” or “preferences.” However the source is understood, it must produce multiple variations, which observers can group into different frequencies of occurrence. The malleable collective body, made of the individuals who live within a given geographic region, is what holds these shifting distributions of variations. However, one can only speak of this malleable collective body as a “population” when scientific observers can locate (or create) within it a surface that both allows them to document distributions of variations and to modify those distributions by means of different methods. Finally, forces of selection are responsible for changes of distributions of variations over time.

We can flesh out this abstract description through the example of smallpox and smallpox inoculation. Late-eighteenth-century observers noted that of those adults who contract this disease, roughly one person in eight will die. The collection of individual living bodies in a given geographic region is the surface that holds variations—in this case, the tendency of each body to succumb or not to the smallpox virus—and the smallpox virus itself is a force of selection that destroys some of those variations (by killing some of these individual bodies) and leaving others unaffected. The similarities of smallpox symptoms across the bodies of individuals present observers with a surface that allows them to identify instances of smallpox. Smallpox inoculation can be introduced into that same surface (that is, individual bodies), which alters the distribution of the force of selection represented by the smallpox disease.
This particular example identifies only two variations—susceptibility or resistance to smallpox—which may suggest that most members of a population are in fact “the same.” However, the key to the modern concept of the population is that one can locate in the same population constants and regularities that bear on many different qualities—responses to other diseases, suicide rates, height distributions, and so on—and each additional survey of the same population renders each individual increasingly unique. I am like roughly 90 percent of the adult population with respect to my response to the smallpox virus but like only 40 percent of the adult population with respect to both my response to the smallpox virus and my response to disease B; like only 20 percent of the population with respect to my response to the smallpox virus, disease B, and my eye color; etc. The deep premise of the modern concept of population, in other words, is that each individual is a unique collection of variations.

The twentieth-century geneticist Ernst Mayr captured this point in a contrast that he drew between “typological” and “population” thinking:

The assumptions of population thinking are diametrically opposed to those of the typologist. The populationist stresses the uniqueness of everything in the organic world. . . . All organisms and organic phenomena are composed of unique features and can be described collectively only in statistical terms. Individuals, or any kind of organic entities, form populations of which we can determine the arithmetic mean and the statistics of variation. Averages are merely statistical abstractions; only the individuals of which the populations are composed have reality. The ultimate conclusions of the population thinker and the typologist are precisely the opposite. For the typologist, the type (eidos) is real and the variation an illusion, while for the populationist the type (average) is an abstraction and only the variation is real. No two ways of looking at nature could be more different.16

For Mayr, this understanding of populations as a collection of unique individuals was the only way to make sense of the emergence of new species as a consequence of geographic difference.17 The fact of individual uniqueness means that a population functions as a kind of reservoir of both visible (phenotypic) and genetic differences. If a subpopulation of a bird species located on one island migrates to a different island, differences among individuals of that migrating population of birds “permit the rapid adaptation of [that] population to [the new] local environment.”18 If this subpopulation of birds remains geographically isolated from the original bird population, it can eventually become a new species, which is unable to breed with the original species from which it has now diverged (see Figure 1).
Though Mayr is likely correct in his contention that population thinking first became an explicit theoretical approach only after Charles Darwin’s work on evolution, Foucault’s work on both biopolitics and liberalism suggests that something like a “practical” mode of population thinking emerged in the eighteenth century in the context of problems such as smallpox inoculation, interest in how the number of geniuses in a nation might be increased, debates about the limits of government control over economic phenomena, and concerns about how to price life insurance. Advocates and critics of smallpox inoculation, for example, had no interest in a natural state or “type” for the human species against which individual variations would be judged but were instead interested in how regularities of smallpox infection within a population could be altered by the practice of inoculation. As I noted in the first chapter, political arithmeticians such as Petty were equally uninterested in a natural state or type of humans but rather in how to increase the incidence of a rare, anomalous variation, the genius, within national populations. Mid-eighteenth-century political economists and physiocrats also tended to valorize differences among individuals with respect to economic decisions, treating these not as deviations from a natural state but simply as givens, in the sense that each individual’s choices were understood to be just as “natural” as those of every other individual. In other words, the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discursive explosion of facts about populations was often predicated, in practice if not in theory, on assumptions more or less identical to those later articulated by Mayr.
This new approach to population implied, in ways that the Malthusian model decidedly did not, that unusual, anomalous variations could serve as the motor of qualitative population transformation. For all its pressure and dynamics, the Malthusian population did not actually change \textit{qualitatively} but only changed in size. The new sciences of population, by contrast, presumed that the distribution of qualities and potentials in a population could change over time and that anomalous qualities could be the means by which such changes occurred. What Foucault called “authoritarian measures,” relied upon the premise that the distribution of qualities in a population could change and might be directed \textit{toward} an unusual trait. In the case of smallpox, for example, a small population with unusually high resistance to smallpox could serve as the “norm” that policy makers aspired to replicate in the more general population.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Society, Normalization, and Literature}

The “metaphysics of populations” may seem rather distant from the concerns of literary criticism, and indeed literary critics of essentially every stripe have followed Godwin’s lead by assuming that the register of population has no significance for our understanding of institutions, literary or otherwise. Formalist literary methodologies are, of course, no more interested in populations than in any other extratextual entities, institutions, or concerns. However, even methodological approaches that explicitly theorize the effects of the world upon literary texts (and vice versa) focus more or less exclusively on the ways that literature serves the institutional function of inculcating normative behaviors.

Consider, for example, Franco Moretti’s account of how the nineteenth-century \textit{Bildungsroman} sought to resolve the task of socialization that previously had been assured by religious rituals. Moretti contends that traditional societies divide social life into “two parts that have nothing in common,” and the purpose of an initiation ritual is to “die” in one social role (say, “boy”) so as to become reborn into another (“man”).\textsuperscript{22} The initiation ritual is thus a period of suspension between two distinct and discontinuous social roles. The \textit{Bildungsroman}, by contrast, was committed to convincing its readers that each moment in life was continuous with everything that precedes and follows it. In Goethe’s \textit{Wilhelm Meister}, there is “no irreversible moment in which everything, in one fell swoop, is decided”; one must instead “be able to dispose of one’s energies \textit{at every moment} and to employ them for the countless occasions or opportunities that life, little by little, takes upon itself to offer.”\textsuperscript{23} In this way, Moretti suggests, the early
Bildungsroman reflects and reveals the dilemma of modern socialization: In place of those institutions of ritual by means of which traditional societies enable transitions between discontinuous social roles, modern culture encourages subjects to engage in perpetual, continuous, and apparently self-directed processes of language-oriented “socialization” (and its corollary, “normativity”). The Bildungsroman—as well as literature more generally—thus becomes, in Moretti’s account, an attempt to resolve symbolically “a dilemma conterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization” (15).

As an explanation of the assumptions that underwrite the specific genre of the Bildungsroman, Moretti’s account is compelling, as are his illuminations of the logical and affective double binds that traverse the modern project of socialization. It is worth stressing, though, how emphatically his account brackets not only the fact of biological variation but variation more generally. Given his role as a literary critic, Moretti is perhaps justifiably uninterested in questions of biological variation (for example, the degree of genetic variability that would be necessary for either a traditional or a contemporary society to persist in time). However, this disinterest in variation reoccurs at the level of culture. For Moretti, the “problem” of cultural reproduction is entirely that of reproducing the same. Whether in the form of traditional rituals that assign the same role (for example, “man”) to all who successfully endure its trials or in the form of those modern socialization rituals by means of which individuals engage in normative “self-determination,” what is at stake is how the many become the same.

Moretti’s approach to variation is not an anomaly within literary criticism; in fact, it expresses in especially clear fashion an understanding of literature as a technology of normativity that underwrites most important accounts of the modern novel. In the introduction to this book, I noted a number of now classic literary critical accounts of novels as norm-enforcing technologies, such as the “monitory image” that Ian Watt locates in Robinson Crusoe; the limiting symbolic acts, ideologemes, and assumptions about genre that Fredric Jameson diagnoses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature; and the domestic novel’s representation of the household, which Nancy Armstrong describes as establishing “the context for representing normal behavior.” For these well-known critics, novels inculcate normative beliefs and practices. Though they employ several quite different theoretical methodologies, these literary critics agree that the novel functions as a modern institution that produces sameness out of difference and does so by naturalizing normative beliefs and behaviors.
Frankenstein’s Populations

Without contesting that the novel has played this role, we can nevertheless ask what it might mean to return to early-nineteenth-century literature and see in it not only an institution of socialization but also a technology that emerged in tandem with the new, non-Malthusian sciences of population. If socialization techniques are premised on an essential malleability of the individual, which allows many individuals to internalize the same common norms, but population technologies are premised on the importance of individual differences, what implications might this latter premise suggest for our understanding of the roles of creative literature?

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein allows us to explore these implications. Shelley does not explicitly use the term “population” in Frankenstein, but Maureen N. McLane has established the centrality of this topic to the novel’s plot. McLane notes that population comes to the fore in Victor’s two key experiments: his initial creation of a creature and his subsequent partial creation, then destruction, of a mate for his creature. McLane stresses that the former is not “an experiment to create a human being but rather an experiment in speciation”—that is, an attempt to create a new population.

For McLane, Victor is a sort of closeted Malthusian, one who shows his true colors when his creature demands that Victor allow this experiment in speciation to continue. At this point Victor shows his Malthusian hand and gropes his way toward the principle of population, a principle through which he finally excuses his frenzied dismemberment of the half-finished female “thing.” . . . What the monster proposes as a solution—a species companion—becomes in Victor’s prospectus the route to a further and more horrifying problem, that of species competition [between humans and what Victor fears would be a new “race of devils”].

Tearing up the would-be mate of his creature, Victor “shows himself to be an adept not of Paracelsus nor even of Humphry Davy but rather of Malthus, who wrote, regarding progress in human society, that ‘in reasoning upon this subject, it is evident that we ought to consider chiefly the mass of mankind and not individual instances’” (103–4). Contrasting Victor’s commitment to Malthusianism to the creature’s commitment to Bildung—that is, the creature’s belief that if he internalized proper social norms through literature, he would be accepted by the human community—McLane concludes that the novel reveals the failure of Bildung when it comes into conflict with the discourse of population.
McLane argues compellingly that the topic of population is essential to *Frankenstein* and reminds us of the ways that conservative commentators appeal to “natural laws” to trump progressive appeals to the power of nurture. Yet is Malthusianism really the key to the role of population in *Frankenstein*? To describe Victor as Malthusian is to suggest that he understands population as a homogenous mass characterized by one dynamic, its reproductive rate. In Victor’s two experiments, though, we find two different conceptions of population, neither of which is precisely Malthusian. As McLane notes, Victor investigates the principle of life in part so that he can create a “new species.” For Victor, creating a new species would give him a claim on their “gratitude”: “A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.” Like Malthus, Victor understands this virtual population primarily as a homogeneous aggregate. However, *pace* Malthus, Victor sees its increase as good, for he presumes that the many individuals of this new species will each feel gratitude toward him. At this point in the novel, Victor adopts an early-eighteenth-century approach to population, for he understands the latter as something under the control of a sovereign authority and that enables the maximization of a desired good (in this case, gratitude).

Victor’s subsequent decision not to create another creature is also made in response to a virtual population, and his fear, as McLane stresses, is based on the link between reproduction and population growth. However, Victor now fears the effects of reproduction precisely because he no longer understands a population as a *homogeneous* entity but instead as an aggregate of variations. Though the creature promises to “quit the neighbourhood of man” (158) with his newly created mate, journeying “to the vast wilds of South America” in order to live a life that is “peaceful and human” (157), Victor concludes that even were the creature (and presumably also his mate) to honor their word, “one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (174). In this scenario, progeny function not, as in Victor’s initial approach to population, as additional sources of the same homogeneous emotion (gratitude) but rather as sources of variation and difference: No matter what the creature and his mate might promise, his children are likely to act differently. Though both Malthus and Victor link populations to reproduction and both fear that population growth will lead to violent competition, they
nevertheless understand the nature of population quite differently. For Malthus, the reproduction of population brings simply more of the same, while for Victor, reproduction of population is a source of difference.

Since the narrative of *Frankenstein* describes the unhappy consequences of Victor’s shift from one model of population to another, it is tempting to conclude that the novel critiques one or both of these models. We might conclude, for example, that had Victor only realized from the start that populations are aggregates of variations that cannot be controlled, he would never have sought to create a new kind of population, and he would thus have spared his family (and their servant Justine) much suffering. From this perspective, *Frankenstein* would indeed function as a technology of socialization, one that valorizes normative beliefs and practices by treating its readers to lessons that reveal the horrifying consequences of improper beliefs and norms.²⁸

As tempting as it is to understand *Frankenstein* as providing either a direct or indirect lesson, such lessons become extraordinarily complicated when they bear upon the topic of population. For example, *had* Victor realized from the start that populations are aggregates of variations that cannot be controlled, he would then also presumably have realized that, since he himself was a member of an existing population, he could not protect himself and his family from the uncontrollable effects of populations simply by choosing or not choosing to create a new population. He might even have concluded that his anomalous wish to create a new population was an instance of those infrequent but nevertheless predictable outlier behaviors that one expects in a large population that lives in a society that allows mobility and self-directed education; as a consequence, even *if* he had destroyed his materials before creating the first creature, another Victor-like autodidact interested in creating life would likely emerge somewhere else. And the only solution to *that* kind of problem, it seems, would be rigid, authoritarian, and disciplinary structures that locate and destroy those far-from-normal instances of individuality that Victor represents.

However, before we arrive at the counterintuitive conclusion that *Frankenstein* endorses, via negative example, authoritarian and conservative social norms, it makes more sense to read the novel’s task less as valorizing one understanding of population over another and more as a matter of helping its readers in the more primary task of learning to see the world in terms of populations. Looking at the world in terms of populations means looking for collective surfaces capable of holding variations and receiving the action of selective forces; it also means locating points at which dynamic
relations between surfaces and selective forces might be slowly altered. This can mean making assumptions about hidden aspects of human biology, such as population growth or disease mortality rates. However, it can also mean looking for variations, surfaces, and selective forces in cultural phenomena, such as choices people make about work, consumption, and pleasure. Thus, rather than providing a didactic lesson about a specific model of population, *Frankenstein* instead provided its readers with tools for identifying aspects of the world that can be understood in terms of populations. It did so by providing two population models (population as homogenous aggregate and population as a heterogeneous aggregate) and a series of dramatic schemata, such as Robert’s and Victor’s desires for glory, the creature’s search for sympathy, and Justine’s legal troubles. These dramatic schemata not only focus attention on points in the social field at which thinking in terms of populations can have effects but also propose specific individual variations, such as the desire for glory or sympathy, or willingness to break laws, that make a difference.

Readers committed to an understanding of literature as a technology of socialization may not be convinced by my distinction between “didactic lesson” and “tools.” Could not every normative “lesson” be redescribed as a kind of “tool”? And does not providing readers with population models necessarily mean socializing readers into a normative way of seeing the world, namely, as “naturally” divided into populations? Both points are valid, but only in a very limited sense. One is already in vexing territory when a purportedly normative way of seeing the world is, as in the case of the modern concept of population, one that itself emphasizes the relativity of norms. Moreover, *Frankenstein* provides its readers with two competing models of population, which emphasizes that facts about populations are always dependent upon both what is out there independently of the model and the specific model of population that is employed. Moreover, as I will discuss near the end of this chapter, even if populations have to be understood as “natural,” they are by no means bound to a biological register, for such models can also be used to locate surfaces that hold variations and forces of selection in those kinds of cultural phenomena to which Robert’s and Victor’s desires for glory pointed.

**Species of Novels: Reviewing *Frankenstein***

The hypothesis that *Frankenstein* encouraged its readers to see the world in terms of populations receives tentative confirmation from the responses of some of Mary Shelley’s first and most important readers, namely, those who
published reviews of her book shortly after its initial publication. Though it had been commonplace since at least Samuel Richardson to describe novels as a particular “species of composition,” *Frankenstein’s* explicit emphasis on the creation of a new biological species allowed reviewers to reframe this literary cliché by considering both the populations that occurred *within* the general species of the novel and the dynamics of and among novelistic species. Walter Scott, for example, noted in his anonymous review of *Frankenstein* that “this is a novel, or more properly a romantic fiction, of a nature so peculiar, that we ought to describe the species before attempting any account of the individual production.” Thinking of the novel not simply as *a* species of composition but rather as a genus or metaspecies—that is, a collective corpus made up of species—helped reviewers (and presumably readers) in several ways. First, it helped reviewers and readers identify and assess the criteria that ought to guide the reading of a particular novel. Many reviewers, for example, understood *Frankenstein* as an example of the “Godwinian” species of novel established by Mary Shelley’s father. Second, the assumption that the novel contained many subspecies helped reviewers and readers make sense of novels that seemed to offer new kinds of reading experiences. Scott, for example, suggested that *Frankenstein* was a new species of novel, one that “excites new reflections and untried sources of emotion” and thus “enlarge[s] the sphere” of the “fascinating enjoyment” of reading novels.

Understanding the novel as a surface made up of species also allowed reviewers to speculate on the forces that encouraged some kinds of variations and discouraged others. Some reviewers, for example, interpreted the departure of *Frankenstein* from the Godwinian norm via the concept of monstrosity, attributing the peculiarity of this novel to a more general contemporary tendency toward exaggeration. The reviewer for the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, for example, claimed that *Frankenstein* represented “one of the productions of the modern school in its highest style of caricature and exaggeration” and sought to identify those elements of the social milieu that encouraged these variations, describing the central premise of the novel as one of “those monstrous conceptions” produced by “the wild and irregular theories of the age.”

The critical tone of these latter comments underscores the fact that reviewers did not seek simply to provide objective taxonomic descriptions of literary productions but also sought to locate points that would allow them to intervene in these dynamics. The reviewer for the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, for example, sought via the genre of the review essay to discourage interest in the genre of “system” (what we would now
call “theory”). The form of the review itself, moreover, was intended to encourage or discourage book sales and, in this way, to affect indirectly an author’s ability to continue to publish. This latter goal was also pursued by means of the acid wit of many nineteenth-century reviewers, which exploited that desire for glory—and corresponding fear of shame—that Shelley had emphasized as motivating both Robert’s and Victor’s endeavors and that certainly motivated many Romantic-era authors.36

If *Frankenstein* encouraged some of its readers—namely, Shelley’s first reviewers—to see the world in terms of populations, this had certainly become a relevant task by the time Shelley’s novel was published in 1818.37 By this point, an ever-increasing number of population models were available, and as Malthus’s attack on the Poor Laws had demonstrated, many of these models had significant implications for daily life. When Shelley published her novel, preeminent among these population models were both the traditional model of national population growth as a virtue and Malthus’s inversion of that model (population growth as a threat). The first model of population supported multiple claims for the proper nature of the polity. In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, this model of population was linked to an absolutist model of political sovereignty through claims that the sovereign’s power increased to the extent that the national population grew. Yet the same model was then deployed in the eighteenth century in liberal critiques of absolutist monarchies. This strategy was exemplified by Montesquieu’s suggestion that the population had declined under the absolutist rule of Louis XIV and the linked claim that populations grew most swiftly where personal liberties were greatest. It was also evident in David Hume’s suggestion that, though Montesquieu was likely wrong in supposing that the global population of the modern world was smaller than that of the ancient world, it was nevertheless true that national population grew most swiftly when trade was encouraged.38

Richard Price provided a republican variant of the model of positive population growth by arguing that the English population had decreased in the last century because of a financial policy that favored national debt and luxury over the simple life of small property owners.39 As I have noted, there were also additional models that focused on differences among members of populations, rather than the overall size of the population. These included accounts of populations inoculated (and by 1818, vaccinated) against smallpox and populations of those who wished to purchase life insurance, to name just two important eighteenth-century versions of this latter model.40 The development of statistical methods in the nineteenth century enabled a veritable explosion of these latter kinds of
population models, with researchers tracking the incidence of suicide, diseases, injuries, accidents, crimes, and many other variables within national and regional populations.\(^{41}\)

When Shelley published her novel, in other words, the term “population” did not have a single referent but rather stitched together multiple (and often incompatible) models and theories of what a population was, how one gathered information about population dynamics, and how that knowledge related to political action. Though by 1818 all of these population models were biopolitical, in the sense that political policies were supposed to be grounded in facts about populations, discerning the differences among these different models and their political implications was not an easy task. In such a milieu, the virtue of *Frankenstein* was that, through both its plot and its references to potential alternative plots (for example, a population of creatures multiplying in South America), it enabled readers to recognize and think through the implications of multiple models of population.

**Populations and Literary Study**

If *Frankenstein* helped nineteenth-century readers engage a milieu characterized by the multiplication of models of populations, what could it mean for literary critics in our even more thoroughly biopolitical twenty-first century to follow the lead of Shelley’s reviewers by understanding literary texts in terms of populations? Franco Moretti has provided one contemporary answer to this question, arguing that literary critics ought to focus on the “literary evolution” of populations of texts such as nineteenth-century short stories and novels.\(^{42}\) Though Moretti has since explicitly abandoned this approach in favor of computer-mediated, quantitative processes of “distant reading,” an account of both the promise and pitfalls of his earlier approach helps us refine what it might mean for literary critics to think literature and its readers in terms of populations.

As Moretti tells his story, from 1987 until roughly 2000, “evolutionary theory was unquestionably the most important single influence” on his work, and during this period, Moretti’s reading of evolutionary theory—which, as it turns out, was primarily based on Ernst Mayr’s work on speciation—encouraged him to treat individual texts as “variations” that are exposed to forces of selection within “ecosystems” of readers.\(^{43}\) These ecosystems encouraged the publication of many variants of a given kind of text. However, as a consequence of strong selective forces, only a small number of the “fittest” variants survived, in the sense that they continued
to be read and published. The kinds of texts considered and the specific nature of the selective forces differ among Moretti’s various articles and books in which he pursued this approach, but the basic schema remained fairly constant. In “On Literary Evolution” (1988), for example, Moretti argued that, following a period of “random variation,” in which a profusion of novel-like forms were generated in the eighteenth century, there was then a period of “necessary selection” exercised by cultural forces, which had the effect of culling out all but one of these variations, the Bildungsroman, which then “dominate[d] the narrative universe” of the nineteenth century. In “The Slaughterhouse of Literature” (2000), Moretti used a similar schema to explain why Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes detective stories became popular and paradigmatic, whereas the similar stories of competitors did not. He described the stories of both Conan Doyle and his competitors as variants within the ecosystem of the literary marketplace, with readers serving as the forces that “selected” the most fit of the variants, namely, those that contained formally compelling “clues.” And in Graphs, Maps, Trees (2005), Moretti drew on evolutionary accounts of populations and speciation to explain, among other things, the emergence and then extinction of nineteenth-century novelistic genres now long since forgotten by anyone but period experts, such as the Anti-Jacobin novel, the Evangelical novel, the Newgate novel, and many others (see Figure 2). Noting that neither random distribution nor the chronology of political events can explain well the cyclical progression of genres revealed by his chart, Moretti proposed that the causes of the “six major bursts of [genre] creativity” we see in the “late 1760s, early 1790s, late 1820s, 1850, early 1870s, and mid-late 1880s” must thus be external to the genres, and common to all: like a sudden, total change of their ecosystem. Which is to say: a change of their audience. Books survive if they are read and disappear if they aren’t: and when an entire generic system vanishes at once, the likeliest explanation is that its readers vanished at once. (20)

Just as for Mayr a new biological species can appear when a population of a species shifts to a new environment, so too for Moretti do new novelistic species (that is, genres) appear when a new generation of readers provides the literary analogue of a new environment. Moretti’s Darwin/Mayr-inspired accounts of populations of literary variants are interesting and provocative for thinking about the dynamics of literary change. The application of evolutionary logic in “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” for example, allows Moretti to provide not only a
compelling new account of the relationship of the literary element of the clue to the genre of the detective story but leads as well to intriguing proposals about both the nature of genres and the ways that authors orient themselves toward the literary marketplace. And the method of genre analysis Moretti proposes in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* leads to an intriguing sketch of the relationship among readers’ preferences, markets, human generations, and literary genres, and one hopes that other researchers will expand this sketch in more detail at some point.

At the same time, though, Moretti’s use of Darwinian evolutionary theory arguably hinders his attempt to understand the dynamics of populations of texts. In a compelling and scathing review of the essays collected in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Christopher Prendergast has pointed out many of these problems. As Prendergast notes, Moretti’s method of understanding literary-historical dynamics through theoretical terms drawn from evolutionary theory (populations, speciation, variations, selections, and competition) “places a very large bet on bringing the laws of nature and the laws of culture closer than they are normally thought to be” (56). Prendergast implies that this bet is unlikely to pay off even were Moretti to map the concepts of natural selection carefully onto literary dynamics and argues explicitly that it does not pay off if natural selection is identified with “the activities of the market” (60). Prendergast underscores the problems of such an approach for someone who, like Moretti, claims to be working from a Marxist perspective: “Philosophers of the market like to think of it as a cognate of Nature. I cannot recall a single ‘Marxist’ who does so. The equation of market and nature under the aegis of evolutionary biology is exactly the move of social Darwinism” (61). What such an approach prevents, Prendergast argues, is *interpretation* of literary history in terms of social and cultural dynamics. Instead of explanation, Moretti can only suggest that “if certain texts are [now] lost to us, that is because they are natural born losers,” that is, not sufficiently fit for the market (61). Just as modern biologists do not seek to “explain” natural selection—it simply is, and it is not to be confused with, say, nature’s pursuit of complexity, perfection, etc.—the market becomes, in Moretti’s account, the unexplainable, quasi-natural force that separates winners from losers.48

Prendergast’s critique of Moretti’s identification of evolutionary and market dynamics also helps us isolate the many divergences of Moretti’s model from the evolutionary theory that he cites as inspiration. In Mayr’s evolutionary model, for example, speciation can occur when differences in geography encourage *an entire population* to drift away genetically from another, still existing population of the original species located somewhere.
else. Neither the members of the original population nor the members of the second population are in competition with one another in the sense that Moretti uses that term, nor are the two populations in competition with each other. For Moretti, though, members of a single population of literary variants are always in competition with one another, and this Malthusian, internecine conflict inevitably eliminates all but one (or at most a few) of the members of the initial population. In “On Literary Evolution,” for example, the Bildungsroman conquers all rivals, while in “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” Conan Doyle’s detective stories destroy all competitors. Even Moretti’s account of the succession of genres in the nineteenth century employs this same schema of a slaughterhouse in which the vast majority of the members of a population are destroyed. Though Moretti’s earlier claim that the Bildungsroman dominated the nineteenth century gave way to his later image of multiple genres, his chart suggests that five to ten genres always dominate a generation of readers and that these are then extinguished to make way for the next five to ten genres that command the attention of the next generation of readers. In each of these accounts, populations of literary variants do not move into new terrain, as in Mayr’s account of speciation, but serve as the pile of textual corpuses upon which the “fittest” can stand.

It is also difficult to coordinate Moretti’s image of large populations being pared down to a few victors with his important claims about the expansion and subdivision of the literary market during the nineteenth century. He notes, for example, that around 1820, “the internal composition of the [literary] market changes,” with the following consequences:

So far, the typical reader of novels had been a “generalist”—someone “who reads absolutely anything, at random,” as Thibaudet was to write with a touch of contempt in *Le liseur de romans*. Now, however, the growth of the market creates all sorts of niches for “specialist” readers and genres (nautical tales, sporting novels, school stories, mystères): the books aimed at urban workers in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, or at boys, and then girls, in the following generation, are simply the most visible instances of this larger process, which culminates at the end of the century in the super-niches of detective fiction and then science fiction.⁴⁹

One would think that this emergence in the nineteenth century of new kinds of readers—urban workers, boys, and girls, to draw on the examples Moretti cites—would encourage the proliferation of new populations of novels, rather than the elimination of most members of a population of literary variants. Yet Moretti’s focus on elimination is a consequence, as
Prendergast correctly notes, of the fact that he seems to understand competition through an economic lens, rather than the biological approach promoted by Mayr. Moretti’s tendency to understand natural selection through the lens of the market also explains the otherwise rather baffling omission from his model of any analogue for sexual reproduction, which would seem to be a sine qua non for population-oriented theories of natural selection.

Yet these criticisms seem to me more a reason to detach Moretti’s concept of populations of literary variants from the framework of evolutionary theory than for rejecting the population approach itself. Or, to put this another way, Moretti simply chose the wrong model of population. Moretti clarifies that he chose evolutionary biological models of populations in order to make literary history more scientific, which suggests that evolutionary biology was for Moretti not a model but simply unequivocal scientific truth. However, as I have noted, every claim about population is based on a model, and—for reasons that Prendergast discusses and that I have supplemented—the evolution-as-market-logic model of populations simply does not fit Moretti’s interests especially well. Choosing (or creating) another population model might allow us to understand better how those populations of literary variants to which Moretti has drawn our attention relate to populations of readers. It might allow us to take into account, for example, both that rise of many new populations of readers to which Moretti points and also the possibility of monstrous crossings of genres noted by some of the first reviewers of *Frankenstein*.

Explicitly treating population theories as models encourages us to relate literary-critical population models to the numerous other kinds of population models employed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors, such as populations of smallpox sufferers, populations of those insured by life insurance contracts, Malthusian populations, and colonial populations. Each of these population models is intended to intervene biopolitically in a specific way, though the population dynamics proposed by each model differs from those of others. Keeping this long history of concepts of population in mind—a history in which, moreover, literature itself played a key role—is vital in order to avoid either reducing or naturalizing the concept of population. Where Moretti arguably failed because of his aspiration to bring to the study of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary market “properly” scientific concepts of population and speciation, I urge us instead to begin with those models of populations developed within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary texts, including both *Frankenstein* and the responses of reviewers to that novel.
Conclusion: Neoliberal Populations and Markets

Prendergast notes that Moretti’s identification of natural selection with the market is eerily reminiscent of “the move of social Darwinism.” While Prendergast likely had in mind social Darwinists of the late nineteenth century, Moretti’s linkages among natural selection, markets, and populations resonate even more strongly with twentieth- and twenty-first-century neoliberal characterizations of the market. Yet it is worth trying to separate the use of population concepts for literary critics, and even parts of Moretti’s method, from these echoes of neoliberalism. I will thus conclude by describing the informatic lens that enables neoliberal theorists to describe markets as the only structures able to solve the kinds of information problems faced by modern societies, so that we can better distinguish this neoliberal logic from the possibilities that Shelley’s approach to population opens up.52

Friedrich Hayek’s neoliberal conceptualization of the market in the 1940s and 1950s is an important twentieth-century site for the deployment of population logic. Writing immediately after the Second World War and in the context of proposals in the United States and the United Kingdom to continue wartime centralized economic planning into peacetime, Hayek contended that the economic information one needs in order to plan centrally—information about, say, raw materials, production costs, and consumer preferences—can never be gathered together at one single point but rather exists “solely as . . . dispersed bits of incomplete and frequently contradictory knowledge which all the separate individuals [of an economy] possess.”53 Hayek’s suggestion that economic knowledge is “dispersed among all the people” presumes that each individual differs from one another, in the sense that each individual is situated in, and has the most knowledge of, his or her own particular “time and place” and his or her “local conditions” (521–22). As a consequence, “practically every individual has some advantage over all others in that he possesses unique information of which beneficial use might be made, but of which use can be made only if the decisions depending on it are left to him or are made with his active cooperation” (521–22). Hayek argued that this distributed knowledge is especially important in the context of changing economic conditions, such as rising or falling production costs or changes in the availability of raw materials (523). The only possibility of “planning” in this state of distributed knowledge is to enable economic competition; that is, “competition . . . means decentralized planning by many separate persons” (521).54 Or, to put this another way, the price system of capitalist competition is a
mechanism by which distributed individual perspectives are brought together and economic problems are “solved” (525). However, Hayek stressed that “the whole acts as one market, not because any of its members survey the whole field, but because their limited individual fields of vision sufficiently overlap so that through many intermediaries the relevant information is communicated to all” (526).

For neoliberals, market relations are thus a kind of population-based computing that has “evolved” within human relations “without [conscious human] design” (527). Hayek’s approach resonates with Mayr’s slightly later account of biological populations, for both Mayr and Hayek emphasize large aggregates made up of unique individuals who each relate to their environments in ways that differ slightly from that of their fellows, and both stress that this system of differences allows the aggregate to change as its environment alters. For Mayr, sexual reproduction allows the characteristics of the population to change, while for Hayek, the price system connects unique individual perspectives in such a way that economic production, distribution, and consumption can shift as the milieu of the economy changes.55

This understanding of the price system as an institution that has evolved autonomously within human relations has encouraged neoliberals to treat the market as a metasurface that ought to contain all other population-oriented surfaces. Neoliberals tend to treat any institution in which they detect population logic—for example, the peer-review system of scientific research, which employs competition among many researchers in order to fund and publish the results of only a small subsection of these—as an implicit market (a “marketplace of ideas”) and suggest that such de facto marketplaces would be more efficient as de jure markets.56 This claim is seductive because it acknowledges resonances between the neoliberal concept of the market and other population approaches. Yet this neoliberal approach ultimately confuses structural similarity with identity: What links the neoliberal concept of the market with the structure of knowledge production in the sciences, for example, is that both employ population logic, rather than that both are markets. Moretti risks a similar conflation between Mayr’s evolutionary biological model and the model of the market.

If, as I noted at the start of this chapter, neoliberalism is bound up with an uncanny, neo-Romantic return to the Malthus–Godwin debate, we should not respond by rejecting the logic of populations, though we should not limit this logic to the register of biology (and especially not the coarse Malthusian axis of “reproduction”), nor should we confuse the logic of population with that of the market. We should instead follow Shelley’s lead.
This means, in part, recovering and fleshing out the numerous population models that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (many of which have continued currency, as both recent invocations of Malthus and the contemporary dominance of actuarial logics make clear). Emphasizing the multiplicity of population models has the virtue of relativizing the neoliberal model of markets as simply one population model among many (and, as Prendergast’s critique emphasizes, often a rather restricting one for understanding the experience of creative literature and the dynamics of literary production since the nineteenth century).

Following Shelley’s lead would also mean understanding creative literature not simply as subject to the population dynamics of literary markets, as in Moretti’s analyses, but also as a space within which existing population models can be gathered for the sake of generating new population models. In the case of *Frankenstein*, the milieu of models included the older model of national population growth as a virtue (in its various political parsings: for example, absolutist, liberal, and republican), the Malthusian inversion of the traditional model, and difference-oriented population models. *Frankenstein* did not endorse any one of those models but brought these into relationship with one another and, in this way, made possible new difference-oriented models of population. Such models may indeed help us understand better how, in a century of ever-expanding readership, novelistic genres crossed and hybridized, creating ever more genres. But to do so, they will likely also force us beyond the conflict between Godwinian and Malthusian subjects—that is, the contest between an infinitely malleable subject always threatened by institutional inscription and a subject unalterably fixed in its biological nature—and toward population subjects that relate to collectivities through individual differences.57 This would in turn mean understanding both Romantic and post-Romantic literature not solely as institutions that create and enforce norms but also as occasions for the invention of new methods of locating and experiencing non-normative variations.