# *Introduction*

The demographic imagination emerged within modern culture as populations exploded. That is to say, the polymodal narratives and images of mass humanity with which this book is concerned appeared in the midst of a demographic revolution: suddenly there were a lot more people.

Some aspects of nineteenth-century demographic change are very familiar to us, urbanization in particular. As early as 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, the majority of the British population was living in "the chief towns or their immediate neighbourhood", and the preamble to the 1861 census report observed that "the English nation then, without losing its hold on the country … has assumed the character of a preponderating city population".[1] By the end of century, the urban was overtaking the rural in France and other European countries, as well as in the United States. But, in addition to this much-adduced historical shift, something was happening at the level of population that was just as significant, a veritable demographic revolution. Advances in medicine, sanitation, transport, and agricultural productivity, as well as industrially driven prosperity, inter alia, supported a dramatic increase in the population.[2] In all parts of Europe, life-expectancy rose across the whole period. In France, for example, if you were born in 1800 you would be doing better than average to live beyond the age of twenty-eight, but by 1910 you might reasonably expect to reach fifty; in Britain in the same years average life-expectancy at birth went from around thirty-six years to fifty-three. (In her longevity Queen Victoria, born in 1819, was ahead of her time.) High infant mortality skews these figures somewhat, but the general picture across the century is clear: life for most people began to be longer and more predictable. As Michael Anderson puts it, "people were no longer expected to die in massive numbers from sudden and unpredictable causes."[3] Of course, the First World War and, more particularly, the influenza epidemic of 1918, might have seemed like a return to old times, demographically speaking, but they were brief interruptions in the general pattern of growth.

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This demographic revolution is usually described with delightful understatement by social geographers, economists, and historians as the "demographic transition". In the longer term it involved a shift in Europe and North America from high fertility and high mortality to low fertility (smaller family sizes) and low mortality (longer lives). But, across the nineteenth century, as the birth rate remained high and mortality fell, it meant a population explosion: there were not only more town- and city-dwellers, but simply many more people. In the case of Britain, the most urbanized territory in Europe, we wrongly picture an emptying countryside. Richard Sennett, for example, evokes a "swath of desolate fields and distressed villages" as the corollary of London's phenomenal growth.[4] In fact, rural numbers were relatively stable, and were even growing in some places, though not at the same spectacular rate as urban ones. There were still more than seven million rural dwellers in Britain in 1901, which roughly equals the number there were in 1801.[5] If the countryside seemed empty, it was because the towns and cities had grown apace: London grew from under a million inhabitants in 1801 to 4.5 million in 1901 (though the Greater London population was 6.5 million), as the population of Britain went from 8.8 million to more than 32 million. Paris and its environs had likewise surged from just over 540,000 in 1801 to a million in 1851, to around 2.7 million at the beginning of the twentieth century, though the national population had increased relatively slowly, from 29 million to 38 million (France, famously, was an early convert to fertility control).[6] Urban life was replacing rural life as the norm, then, against a background of growth, sometimes massive growth, in overall populations. In Europe, Britain led the way by almost quadrupling its numbers, but across the nineteenth century the populations of Spain and Italy doubled, that of Germany more than doubled, and Russia's grew threefold. (Ireland, decimated by famine and mass emigration, was a notable exception to this upward trend.) In the early twentieth century, this phenomenal increase would be seen by Ortega y Gasset as the "statistical fact" underpinning what he termed the "revolt of the masses":

> The fact is this: from the time European history begins in the 6th Century up to the year 1800 – that is, through the course of twelve centuries – Europe does not succeed in reaching a total population greater than 180 million inhabitants. Now, from 1800 to 1914 – little more than a century – the population of Europe mounts from 180 to 460 millions! … In three generations it produces a gigantic mass of humanity which, launched like a torrent over the historic area, has inundated it.[7]

More recent estimates suggest a shift from around 188 million to 458 million, but the dramatic shift is undeniable: an increase of almost 250 percent. One does not have to share Ortega y Gasset's bleak analysis of mass society to see that he had put his finger on a significant demographic phenomenon, a transformation as dramatic in its way as the French or the industrial revolution.[8]

Nor, as James Belich has shown recently, was this torrent of humanity confined to Europe. Some of the most dramatic transformations were taking place in the Anglophone settler colonies of the United States and Australia, driven by recurring cycles of boom, bust, and export rescue.[9] (The explosive population growth of Britain in the nineteenth century seems all the more remarkable in the light of the numbers it exported in these years, but in fact those emigrants were the basis of settler societies that sent food and raw materials back to the motherland, sustaining population growth.) In the United States, for example, by 1900 there were thirty-eight urban centers of 100,000 or more, larger than any American town had been at the beginning of the century, and the overall population had gone from 5.3 million to 76 million. Driven by immigration as well as by natural increase, New York had grown even faster than London, but from a lower base, from around 60,000 at the start of the century to more than 3 million in 1900. As in Europe, the overall urban population of the United States overtook the rural early in the twentieth century.[10]

Urban concentration, then, was part only of a wider demographic revolution. But crucially it made that revolution dramatically visible: whether in the New World or old, nowhere was the emergence of Ortega y Gasset's "statistical fact" more evident than in mushrooming cities and towns. Robert Vaughan, writing in 1843, was already terming it the "age of great cities", and many later writers on both sides of the Atlantic shared this view.[11] From this perspective, London was the city of cities: in 1891, Sidney Webb observed that London had a larger population than Ireland, and was roughly equivalent to Wales and Scotland combined; there were more Londoners than Norwegians, Greeks, Australians, or Swiss.[12] By 1900, Greater London had a bigger population than the entire United States could boast at the beginning of the century. Most of this growth was due to natural increase – the outpacing of mortality by fertility – rather than migration.[13]

Such extraordinary changes at the level of population produced the cultural response that I am terming the demographic imagination. In this light the explicit modernist hostility to the torrent of humanity that John Carey describes in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) is just one

facet of a wider cultural reaction, a reaction that begins well before modernism, and that has no single politics. It would be possible, indeed, to fold much nineteenth-century cultural production into the category of the demographic imagination. It would include the industrial novels and slum novels that deal with numbers directly, such as *Mary Barton* (1848), and *A Child of the Jago* (1896), and regional novels of knowable community that sidestep the demographic revolution, like *Middlemarch* (1874). Another aspect is represented by the Victorian Robinsonades and imperial adventure narratives that offer dreams of escape from the overcrowded urban world, like *The Coral Island* (1858). In fine art we see thinly peopled landscape paintings that deliberately eschew the human herd (John Constable), as well as urban crowd scenes that seek to give the masses a shape, however complicated (the panoramic works of William Powell Frith, for example). On stage, we can see that melodrama, with its thematics of the aleatory and its cities of lost children (*Les Deux Orphelines*), is a form deeply marked by population increase, as much as by political and social revolution.

For writers in all modes the demographic revolution exerted more subtle pressures too. The Victorian orphan is a symbolic figure, and the isolation of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, or the vulnerabiltiy of Oliver Twist, or the rootless social mobility of Becky Sharp cannot simply be read as reflecting Victorian or even authorial realities: Lucy Snowe is not Charlotte Brontë. At the same time, the sudden deaths of parents, siblings, and friends do correspond with actuarial probabilities in the earlier part of the century: Lucy Snowe *is* Charlotte Brontë, at least in part. Across the century ageing and longevity become a recurring source of interest, anticipating our own engagement with these topics, and, by the end of the century, in keeping with demographic trends, we begin to find longer fictional lives; whole families are no longer so easily swept away.[14] Let us take a few well-known instances of how actuarial realities began to register in imaginative form. Greta Conroy's working-class sweetheart, Michael Furey, might die young in James Joyce's "The Dead" (1914), but she herself lives to look back on his death from adulthood; and Gabriel Conroy's elderly aunts are a direct link to the musical greats of another era. While it is a novel written under the shadow of the First World War, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) also allows us a glimpse of the new longevity. Mrs. Dalloway's aunt, Miss Helena Parry, is expected by Peter Walsh to be long dead, a figure from "a different age".[15] However, when we finally reach Clarissa's party towards the novel's end we discover that "Miss Parry was not dead; Miss Parry was alive" (233), and still eager to discuss what Charles Darwin said about her

book on the orchids of Burma, which "went into three editions before 1870" (235). Likewise, immediately after the further industrial slaughter of the Second World War, the general expectation of greater life security is discernible as a background assumption. In Elizabeth Taylor's *A View of the Harbour* (1947), for example, the retired Bertram Hemingway is the most active – or meddling – character; he is paired off with the novel's divorced beauty, Tory, at the novel's ending, marking the beginning a new phase in both their lives. Earlier, as if in explicit acknowledgement of how the narrative game has changed, Doctor Cazaubon has assured his novelist wife, Beth – whose works are well known for their deathbed scenes and funerals – that nobody need die of pneumonia these days.[16] (Alexander Flexing, Ernst Boris Chain, and Edward Abraham had received the Nobel Prize two years before the novel appeared for their foundational work with penicillin, which paved the way for modern antibiotics.)

Since then, the longer life has become the norm among the world's more affluent nations, and the literature and film of the twenty-first century has responded. In recognition of changing demographics and the idea of a "third age", in 2006, the National Endowment for the Humanities in the United States sponsored a series of lectures, screenings, and discussions in fourteen states on "The Elderquest: The Emergence of the Cinema and Literature of Age".[17] The material considered included work by Ingmar Bergman, David Lynch, and Paule Marshall, all of whom have explored longevity in fictional form. Aside from such explicit treatments, we can also track the long revolution in life-span expectations through the changing fantasies of our international popular culture. It is unlikely, for example, that the tongue-in-cheek murders of *Midsomer Murders* (1996– ) would have the same ironic appeal if life had continued to be quite as short for most English people as it was in 1800. If the death rate in picturesque English villages was as high as the series suggests, *Midsomer* might still entertain as modern gothic, but it could scarcely fall into the category of comfort television.[18]

Taken to mean all of the cultural reflexes of demographic change since 1800 – including explosive population growth, but also longer lives, smaller families, and immigration – the demographic imagination threatens to encompass far more than any academic monograph might reasonably discuss, from Romantic poems of rural retreat to sprawling Victorian city novels, to contemporary Hollywood yarns of invasion by zombies or aliens. Here, on a more modest scale, I want to focus on the first phase of the demographic imagination, the response to the unprecedented population explosion of the nineteenth century. I will present five facets of the

response to mass humanity, which could be labeled loosely as apocalyptic, criminal, supernatural, visual, and proto-ecological. We will look at three new genres (volcanic disaster narratives, crime dramas, urban ghost stories), consider how an established one changed (urban genre painting), and conclude with the emergence of a new way of seeing human populations in relation to other species (proto-ecological campaigns against animal fashion). John Carey has argued that it was in hostile reaction to "the masses" – or rather those that the intellectual minority perceived to be "the masses" – that experimental modernism developed, particularly in Britain in the aftermath of the universal education offered by the Education Act of 1870.[19] I will be arguing that similar attitudes were in place long before then. Some of the primary materials I discuss are relatively well known: for example, Edward Lytton Bulwer's (later Edward Bulwer Lytton) *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), the crime dramas that followed the success of Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–43), and the urban ghost stories of J. S. Le Fanu and Henry James; others perhaps less so, such as the urban genre paintings of Augustus Mulready, and the activities of the Plumage League. This is for the most part a study of the nineteenth-century urban imagination, then, but one that keeps Ortega y Gasset's "statistical fact" clearly in focus; it is not just city life that is registered, but the sheer pressure of numbers everywhere.

This is not primarily a book about the representation – political and aesthetic – of the crowd as a collective subject, nor one about literature and the nineteenth-century public sphere, nor an account that charts the relations of people to the body of the city. That ground has been covered by others, and even by myself to some extent.[20] Instead I want to explore the ways in which the demographic imagination operates through cultural forms that do not always foreground the crowd. In his essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", Walter Benjamin suggests that the Parisian crowd is the necessary historical condition for Baudelaire's urban lyrics: it does not have to be explicitly mentioned in the poems to be the shaping force for the urban experiences he describes.[21] To some extent this is my model here: the population explosion is not always directly evoked, but it underpins a whole array of cultural forms.

The demographic imagination of the nineteenth century is mobile. Many of the recurring motifs I discuss here, such as the volcanic disaster, were "polymodal", jumping the species barriers among popular spectacle, opera, verse, prose fiction, and drama; fashion, the subject of my last chapter, spans journalism, material culture, international commerce, and the practices of everyday life. My approach, then, is

perforce interdisciplinary. But if the materials I consider were no respecters of generic boundaries, most of them were also mobile in a different sense, in that they glided easily across national boundaries. At a time of unprecedented urban growth it is, perhaps, not surprising that stories and images of city streets became the stuff of national culture. But the urban also trumped the national, and certain city motifs and materials, from high and low culture alike, scaled linguistic and other cultural walls with remarkable ease. This was an international (or, perhaps more accurately, transnational) urban culture: the crime dramas that drew crowds to the Boulevard Saint-Martin also pleased in the Strand, and in the Bowery; what chilled readers in Merrion Square might also produce a frisson in Washington Square; the urban genre scenes that charmed the Royal Academy likewise found favor in New York and Buffalo. Popular plays and novels were translated, reprinted, and adapted, often with little financial benefit to their originators; and certain urban genre subjects – newsboys and flower-sellers, among others – were endlessly repainted. Across the period I consider here, urban fashion too became increasingly transnational, and images, narratives, and material goods shuttled rapidly across national borders: exotic feathers and furs found their way to Paris, London, and New York. Transformed into chic feathered hats and sealskin coats they soon moved on to other cities, abetted by a proliferation of French-inspired fashion magazines and newspaper columns. The proto-ecological response to these animals fashions was also transatlantic, as we shall see.

Such mobility was in part possible because life in London or New York was coming to resemble more closely life in Paris than life in the rural parts of Britain or the United States. Nations had their differences, but, as populations burgeoned, the life of the modern city shared similar contours across national borders, and we can see a convergence of what Pierre Bourdieu terms *habitus* as rising populations dealt with similar experiences, as well as shared fantasies of escape to the good life. Again, the numbers matter here: London was the only world city of 1 million inhabitants in 1800, but by the 1850s Paris and New York had reached that size, and by 1890 they had been joined by six other cities, including Chicago and Philadelphia; by 1920 there were twenty.[22] The largest cities were becoming very large indeed, in effect becoming more like nations, city states in their economic power; imagined communities with their own newspapers and news-cycles, they were also attuned to what people were reading, watching, and wearing in the older super-cities of London and Paris, which continued to offer models of urban life. There was no single international urban culture, but there existed a considerable degree of similarity among heterogeneous ones.

We have long been aware of some aspects of this asymmetrical cultural internationalism, which is rather different in kind to that sketched in Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* (2004). Where Casanova argues that literary goods come to Paris to be consecrated, the nineteenth-century circuits I wish to describe here have no single hub. Paris does nonetheless loom large in terms of its influence on the transnational demographic imagination. Some aspects of this hegemony are well known. Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Wilkie Collins, Tom Taylor, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and M. E. Braddon, among others, all either wrote about Paris as a modern capital, or drew directly on French literary models.[23] For the most part, in the theater as in fashion, France's dominance was openly admitted. As Allardyce Nicoll put it in his 1946 *History of Late Nineteenth-Century Drama*, by 1850 English drama was "in the midst of a free filching from the French". This borrowing continued for the rest of the century: he quotes Percy Fitzgerald's gloomy comment from 1881 that "at this moment it may be said that the English stage is virtually subsisting on the French"; and Edward Morton's equally pessimistic assessment from an article of July 1897 entitled "The French Invasion": "the [current] theatrical entertainment offered by the capital of the greatest empire of the world includes one play, and only one, by an English dramatist of note".[24] To some degree this was a result of the weakness of international copyright, and Charles Dickens's Nicholas Nickleby was neither the first nor the last to find employment as a translator of French plays for English managers. Charles Kean, for example, in his first three years as actor-manager of the Princess's Theatre bought eleven French translations for a total of £1,135.[25] Whatever entertained audiences at, say, the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin could be quickly translated and offered up at the Adelphi, or the Princess's, or indeed Drury Lane, and the same play would do good business in New York, or Boston, or Philadelphia. While copyright, or its lack, contributed to this rapid circulation, it would not have been feasible unless the urban themes and situations worked for international audiences.

The French *mise en scène* could be retained, or it could be changed, or "localized", to appeal more directly to the English or American house. Thus Adolphe d'Ennery and Eugène Cormon's great urban melodrama *Les Deux Orphelines* (1874) kept its Parisian setting when it emigrated to the Union Square Theatre in New York as Jackson N. Hart's *The Two Orphans* (also 1874); but the Paris of Édouard Brisebarre and Eugène Nus's *Le Retour de Melun* (1860; staged as *Léonard* at the Théâtre de la Gaité on December 31, 1862) easily became the London of Tom Taylor's *The*

*Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863) at the Olympic in London and the Winter Garden and other venues in New York that same year; and the Paris of Brisebarre and Nus's *Les Pauvres de Paris* (1856) became, in the dexterous hands of Dion Boucicault, variously New York, Liverpool, or London, as the venue required. As Boucicault said in a letter to the manager/dramatist Edward Stirling, "I localize it for each town, and hit the public between the eyes".[26] "Localization" is a term now used in information technology for the adaptation of software to a regional national market; in the nineteenth century it covered a different type of intellectual property.[27] Termed "local dramas" by reviewers, these city plays gave audiences the thrill of seeing sets based on their own neighborhoods, and were a reliable box office draw.[28] What worked for drama sometimes worked for fiction too: as Michael Denning and Stephen Knight have shown, France exported Eugène Sue's bestselling *Les Mystères de Paris* to London, New York, Philadelphia, Berlin, Madrid, Barcelona, and Naples. The titles that resulted included George Lippard's *The Quaker City; or the Monks of Monk Hall* (1844–45), G. W. M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* (1844–46), Ramon de Naverette's *Madrid y sus misterios*, and "Ned Buntline"'s [Edward Zane Carroll Judson's] *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1848).[29]

However, no monogenetic account of the demographic imagination can really convince. Paris was not the only moveable feast: Anglophone successes, for instance, were also translated into French, including Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, which became Ludovic Bernard's *Olivier Twist, ou l'Orphelin du dépôt de mendicité* (1841), and L. de Potter's *Le Juif de Bethnal Green, ou les voleurs de Londres* (1843–44); G. W. M. Reynolds's *Mysteries of the Court of London* (1848–56), originally inspired by French models, was reimported as *Les Mystères de la Cour de Londres* (1866). Nor was this cultural circulation confined to plays and novels, since operas, ballets, and paintings could be equally mobile. To take one instance from Chapter 1, Giovanni Pacini's Italian opera, *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei* (1825) seems to have inspired Thomas Gray's American novel *The Vestal, or, A Tale of Pompeii* (1830) and Edward Bulwer Lytton's English novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), which in turn formed the basis of transatlantically successful Pompeian paintings, sculptures, firework spectaculars, and, by the early twentieth century, films, including, with pleasing symmetry, the Italian *Gli Ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1908). Individual performers and sometimes entire companies circulated transatlantically too, from the French actor Charles Fechter, to the dog acts of Blanchard and Cony, to the acting companies of Dion Boucicault and Augustin Daly. Thus, if certain visions of the teeming city circulated widely, this was because styles

of performance, attitudes and affects, and modes of *mise en scène* were transmitted as well as texts and images. Popular songs, melodies, and dances crossed and recrossed the Atlantic as well as the English Channel (or *la Manche*), as freely as did painters and sculptors, styles, subjects, techniques.

In emphasizing the international or perhaps transnational dimension of the demographic imagination I am following what has become in recent years a distinct trend. Critics have been reading British culture "contra-puntally", to use Edward Said's famous term, for some time, and post-colonial studies have explored the imbrication of empire and the slave trade in literary and cultural history. Said's work, as well as Paul Gilroy's influential *The Black Atlantic* (1993), have underwritten new approaches to cultural history that show the limits of national paradigms, as well as the interconnectedness of freedom and exploitation. Tim Watson's *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World, 1780–1870* (2008), for example, shows the centrality of the Caribbean in Britain's imagining of itself, even after the decline of the sugar trade, while also tracing Caribbean inflections of colonial narratives.[30] From a different perspective, the work of Elaine Freedgood has allowed us to recover the way in which the material culture of the English novel can lead us down long metonymic threads to the global economy.[31] Others have sought to use cosmopolitanism as a way to think about culture flows that are not aligned with nation and empire.[32] Closer to my project here, there has also been an awakening of interest in the transnational currents between Britain and the United States, all the more surprising, perhaps in that Victorianists and Americanists tend to be trained in separate cadres, attend different conferences, and publish in different academic journals and series. But, as John Picker notes in a recent review essay on transatlantic Victorianism, after a period in which the field scarcely existed, there are now a number of substantial studies, including Kate Flint's *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776–1930* (2008), Julia Sun-Joo Lee's *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel* (2010), and the collection edited by Meredith McGill, *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange* (2008).[33] These books address the crossings of texts, performances, and, to a lesser extent, people in roughly the same period I consider.

In charting the cultural response to the demographic revolution, I have laid out a slightly different transnational chart, in which the traffic between Paris and London, and to a lesser extent that between Paris and New York, features alongside Anglophone exchanges. Less work has appeared on these circuits, though there are some notable exceptions, such as Margaret