Approximating the realist and fantasy modes through "Framley Parsonage" and "Tooth and Claw"

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Approximating the Realist and Fantasy Modes through *Framley Parsonage* and *Tooth and Claw*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The emergence of a relatively new sub-genre of historical fiction has been marked by an increase in their number and popularity, throughout the twentieth century and even up to the present moment. This growing body of contemporary writing that takes as its source Victorian literature and its embedded cultural practices has been alternately termed ‘Post-Victorian’, ‘Victoriana’ and ‘neo-Victorian’ amongst many others. The proliferation of terms not only reflects the difficulty of imposing categorisation on this subgenre but also points to the increasing critical attention being given to it. In investigating the relations between Jo Walton’s *Tooth and Claw* (2003) and its Victorian predecessor, Anthony Trollope’s *Framley Parsonage* (1861), this paper not only adds to the increasing scholarship on the neo-Victorian but will demonstrate how the apparently disparate modes of fantasy and realism may be said to share the same fundamental principles.

As Robin Gilmour has noted, there are “at least six uses to which Victorian history and Victorian fiction have been put in this period [emphasis added]” (190). While his identification points towards the varied nature of how the Victorian may be utilised, there
appears to be a penchant for transposing (what are commonly identified as) Victorian elements into popular fiction most commonly in the fantastic and science fiction genres as evidenced not only by *Tooth and Claw* but also by other works within the oeuvres of contemporary authors such as Kim Newman, Jasper Fforde, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. The transposition of Victorian elements to these genres proves a particularly intriguing choice as these elements are usually aligned with the ‘realist’ rather than the fantastic.

The focus on the aforementioned pendant novels will thus be an investigation specifically of the relations between realism and the fantastic. The choice of the texts makes this undertaking particularly interesting as *Tooth and Claw* is categorised within the fantastic mode because it literalises a particular element from its realist predecessor, *Framley Parsonage*. The scope of the paper will then aim to be at once broad, in making comments on the realist and fantasy genres while also narrowing its focus in interrogating these concepts through the chosen fictions. This paper attempts to go some way in answering these questions: The ‘realist,’ or rather, the ‘real,’ and the ‘fantastic’ appear to be diametrically opposed concepts, but are they so different when manifested through literary texts? What are the formal differences between the realist and the fantasy novel? What does the fantasy genre bring to the Victorian framework? How does a reading of a contemporary reworking alter our perspective of its predecessor?

1.2 Literature Review

The establishment of the academic journal *Neo-Victorian Studies* in 2008 seems indicative of the growing critical commitment to the “contemporary fascination with re-imagining the nineteenth-century” (“Aims and Scope”). Still, the infancy of the genre has meant that there has yet to be a critical consensus on its terminology as mentioned earlier. In “(Re)workings of
Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts”, Andrea Kirchknopf discusses the various terms (and their implications) that prove useful for a critical engagement with contemporary revisions of the Victorian. Her term of choice is the ‘post-Victorian’ as “it displays nuances in both the historical and the aesthetic realms and does not yet seem to exhibit enough distinctive features that would allow its separation from the current postmodern context” (Kirchknopf 59). While the “integrative nature” of the term does appear fitting for the “interdisciplinarity of the research in the field” (Kirchknopf 59) as well as the diverse nature of fictional works that may be classified under the genre, Kircknoph’s inclusion of George Letissier’s definition of the ‘post-Victorian’ makes it a problematic one. His (and Kirchknopf’s ostensibly) choice of the term rests on how it “conflates post-modernism and Victorianism, highlighting the paradoxes of historical continuity and disruption that underpin the post-Victorian cultural movements [emphasis in the original]” (Letissier qtd. in Kirchknopf 65).

The chosen term ‘post-Victorian’, while undoubtedly appropriate for discussions pertaining to texts that adopt a postmodern stance of suspicion coupled with elements of the Victorian, appears unsatisfactory for a focus on the generic similarities or differences between the chosen pendant novels. This is so as the neo-Victorian Tooth and Claw may more readily be termed ‘contemporary’ rather than ‘postmodern’ in its failure to exhibit what has generally been identified as the hallmarks of postmodernism, such as the extensive use of pastiche and fragmentation. Evidently, while texts may be produced within what has been termed the postmodern era, they may not necessarily be postmodernist, that is postmodern in praxis. This begs a return to the evaluation of the other available terms for the subgenre. Kircknoph’s rejection of the term ‘neo-Victorian’ is based on what she sees as a failure to provide “a more complex definition” (Kirchknopf 62) other than it being a “new literary
movement whose very essence consisted in re-thinking and rewriting Victorian myth and stories” (Gutleben qtd. in Kirchknopf 62). While this criticism appears valid, the very generality of the definition may be reconfigured in more positive terms. In fact, Kirchknopf’s criticism of the term appears to point to its potential for critical use should it be subjected to greater theorisation. Yet, its broad terms may be seen as especially fitting for a genre that has not had long-standing critical attention and one whose production occurs in what is arguably a postmodern context of endless play and thus, experimentation. While it retains this association of being new and not strictly defined, the ‘neo-Victorian’ avoids the conflation of all contemporary fictions with postmodernism that the earlier mentioned ‘post-Victorian’ appears unable to escape from. The definition given by Gutleben, instead of positing an advancement past all things Victorian as the prefix ‘post-’ implies, also has the added benefit of acknowledging a continuity with the Victorians and the legacy given to us through various forms of cultural life that volumes such as Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time (Krueger 2002) take as their subject. While the usage of ‘neo-Victorian’ appears to hierarchically place emphasis on the future (Kirchknopf 65), the usage of the prefix ‘post-’ does not appear a necessarily better substitute as it imbues the contemporary with a sense of belatedness and by extension, a lesser importance. The emphasis given to the future might also be viewed in a less negative sense as it is precisely the genre’s contemporary status that allow these rewrites to supply “renewed or revised perspectives on the earlier texts and the cultural moments of their original production” (Bowler and Cox 3). Another benefit of the ‘neo-Victorian’ is its emphasis on the genre as a relatively new phenomenon (Kirchknopf 63). Of course, this sense of being new is not a chronological one as its existence has been identified as early as the 1960s. Instead, its ‘newness’ may be felt in such contemporary rewrites being continually produced and remaining of interest to the contemporary reader, academic or otherwise.
1.3 Affinities between the Victorian Age and the Present

It appears appropriate at this juncture to discuss the possible reasons for what appears to be a sustained interest in the Victorian within the present age. This becomes especially interesting when you consider that the Victorians have often (mistakenly or not) been seen as vastly different from us in the present. The Victorians have acquired a reputation for being straitlaced and austere, with strict codes of social conduct and sexual restraint. While this view of the Victorians has been re-examined and revised by scholars adopting post-Foucauldian approaches, it is this idea of the Victorians that appears firmly entrenched in the minds of the majority.

Putting aside questions of Victorian morality and social strictures, it is interesting to note the similarities that persist from the Victorian age to our present one. The development of the ‘steampunk’ genre into an entire culture comprising its own music, artwork and fashion (Grossman and Moskowitz), exemplifies this staying power of the Victorian. In much the same vein, the present appetite for neo-Victorian fiction may be seen as analogous to the reading appetites of the Victorian public. Just as the Victorian period may be seen as “the first historical period in which fiction as a literary genre was culturally central” (Jenkins and John 1) thus enabling the profit and expansion of the literary market, it is only in recent decades that the neo-Victorian has managed to achieve such centrality and popularity, “reclaiming their relevance in a new century” (McWilliam 107). As Mark Llewellyn points out, “historical fiction sells, and Victorian historical fiction [classified as part of the neo-Victorian in its intimate engagement with the Victorian past] sells better than most” (42). This is turn reflects that however the neo-Victorian “references Victorian society and remembers its imaginative literature, there is something in the reference itself that still seems to hold our attention and produce a strongly affective readerly response” (Kaplan 114) that
recalls the state of the reading public in the past and emphasizes that “our habits are not exclusive to our own era, but share a continuity and commonality of traditions with the Victorians” (Bowler and Cox 1).

The neo-Victorian not only makes clear the affinity between the Victorian and contemporary reader but also draws an association between the authors of the Victorian period as well as some of our contemporary ones. This association is seen in how “we postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit” “of adapting just about everything and in just about every possible direction” (Hutcheon 2006 qtd. in Bowler and Cox 1) that the Victorians had. This “self-conscious engagement with the processes of adaptation and appropriation themselves” (Bowler and Cox 3) has been posited as one of the attractions of the neo-Victorian amongst the various reasons that have been put forth to explain the ascendance of the genre. The popularity of the neo-Victorian becomes especially interesting when considering how classic Victorian texts have faced a considerable decline in their readership. In choosing to focus on this specific pairing of a Victorian text and its contemporary revision, there is also the hope that we may glean further understanding on what makes the neo-Victorian so engaging to contemporary readers.
2. The Generic Approach

Aside from the complexities of defining the literary category *Tooth and Claw* falls under, one might wonder why such a handle is even necessary. This section seeks to answer just such a question by showing how genre functions as an ‘interpretive programme’ that underpins the narrative structures of both *Tooth and Claw* and *Framley Parsonage* while still allowing enough scope for the divergences between the two. These differences do not exist only in their social and historic contexts but also extends past them to their aesthetic differences.

2.1 Context

As Dennis Walder points out, “approaching literature through the study of its genres has been fundamental to literary criticism in the European languages since Aristotle’s *Poetics* in the fourth century BC” (3). This placing of specific texts in relation to the “few general prescriptive principles” (Walder 3) that constitutes various genres persists even to the present moment, where genres have been continually refashioned or subverted for various purposes. The centrality and persistence of this approach to critical analysis asserts that “taking into account genre is one important way of thinking about the meaning and interest of literary texts” (Walder 4). This way of reading literary texts is not limited to academic readers, although the identification of generic characteristics may have been so long in existence that it has become an unconscious process to the common reader. This becomes most apparent in considering a text such as the detective novel. Any reader of such a fiction comes to the text with the expectation of there being a mystery that would move towards resolution by the end of the novel. This principle of generic expectations holds true for Victorian novels as well as readers have come to associate certain conventions with the genre. Of course, with the Victorian age being an “unsurpassed period of innovation in fiction” (Jenkins and John 6) giving rise to a multiplicity of genres (incidentally inclusive of the detective novel), taking
the Victorian novel as a broad genre becomes problematic as there may be seen to be a multitude of conventions that specific literary texts may be read against.

2.2 The Genre of the Victorian Novel

What appears to be the dominant form of the Victorian age (in broad terms) is what has been termed the classic realist novel. This aesthetic mode demands an accumulation of material detail and specificities that aim to present (or represent) plausible worlds, often reflecting everyday experience. What much scholarship does in dismantling the realist project and its capacity for mimesis misses the point as Caroline Levine points out, the “nineteenth century theorists of realism” knew “full well that representation and the world were at odds” (24). Thus, they did not seek for a “style or effect of mimesis, but for the laborious act of attending to the world” (25). This emphasizes the distinction that is to be made between the present reality that is ‘real’ and experiential and reality in its aesthetic mode. Such an understanding of realism would prove more productive than pointing out the various ways in which a text (understandably) fails to simulate the fabric of reality. This however, does not render the genre wholly unproblematic. While acknowledging the impossibility of language to fully represent the world and reality in its full complexity, it is important to note that there are instances in the Victorian novel where experiences or happenings do not appear plausible even within its own self-contained world. This becomes more apparent when considering the definition of ‘formal realism’ that Ian Watt provides in his influential study of the rise of the novel form. The use of this mode of representation is described as being when

the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of
their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. (Watt 222)

This definition is worth quoting in its entirety as it provides us with characteristics that may be used to distinguish the realist form. More importantly, the description of the realist novel as a “full and authentic report of human experience [emphasis added]” (Watt 222), as with the name of the genre itself, posits a claim to a sense of authenticity even if it does not purport to be a faithful rendering of ‘external’ reality. The converse is also true as the aesthetic mode of realism may be said to fail when its representation of events appear unlikely or more fictive than authentic.

This sense of inauthenticity in the realist novel has by no means escaped critical attention. Beginning a volume of essays on the works of Anthony Trollope, arguably one of the foremost proponents of the realist mode, Jane Nardin points out how a scene in Trollope’s historical novel La Vendee appears more “ludicrous than thrilling to the contemporary reader of serious fiction” (xiv). Nardin describes how the protagonist Henri, being pursued by revolutionary soldiers, kills his attacker, heroically leaps from the window, runs through a garden and manages to protect his fiancée Marie’s modesty by averting his gaze from her “fair bosom, which was all exposed“ (Trollope qtd. in Nardin xiv). The limits of plausibility are stretched even further as the reader realises that all these heroic feats are accomplished even as Henri is carrying Marie “as though she were an infant” (Trollope qtd in Nardin xiii).

While Nardin’s aim is to point out how the text contains a “view of men as powerful and active, women as passive and fearful” (xiv), what her reading of the passage indicates is the implausibility of these actions, since they are presented only in order to reify the then-contemporary’s notions about both genders. This same sense of unreality in the Victorian
novel is what provided Jo Walton with the impetus for writing *Tooth and Claw*. As she asserts in its foreword,

> it has to be admitted that a number of the core axioms of the Victorian novel are just wrong. People aren’t like that. Women, especially, aren’t like that. This novel is the result of wondering what a world would be like if they were, if the axioms of the sentimental Victorian novel were inescapable laws of biology. (Walton 5)

Accordingly, Walton creates a framework of literalising in her novel that points out the unreality embedded in its source text of *Framley Parsonage*. The significance of this decision to create a fictional world with such “inescapable laws of biology” (Walton 5) will be expounded upon later. What is crucial here is the highlighting of how both these chosen texts may be tested according to the sense of authenticity (or inauthenticity) of their fictional worlds, especially in light of the prescriptive rules that their respective genres entail.
3. *Framley Parsonage*

Anthony Trollope has long been recognised not only as one of the most successful and prolific authors of the Victorian period, but also for his commitment to realism in writing “almost exclusively within the range of the conventions of English realism” (Levine 7). No doubt Trollope’s fiction has often been seen as useful as a reflection of Victorian society but what appears to be a more productive project is not to test “his vision of society against what we can know of the realities of Victorian life, but by examining the rules of his game” (Levine 7). As the preceding section has established, the use of the term ‘realism’ is often fraught with difficulties in its unavoidable association with experiential reality. It thus becomes important to remember that the term (in this context) refers to its aesthetic and literary use, and that any investigation of its importance should be carried out according to its conventions or rules instead of a comparison to reality. In examining the workings of Trollope’s fictions in the realist mode, this oft-quoted portion of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s comments on Trollope is useful in its indication of how Trollope’s fiction have been recognised as,

> solid and substantial… just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business and not suspecting that they were being made a show of

(Hawthorne qtd. in Trollope, *Autobiography* 85)

While this comment emphasizes the success of the aesthetic realism produced in Trollope’s fiction, it is also particularly useful in highlighting the ways in which we can interrogate the role of the narrator in *Framley Parsonage*.

3.1 The Trollopian Narrator – Disruptive or Integral Consciousness?

The narrative that we are presented with is filtered through a consciousness that stands apart from the daily happenings of what he or she describes. Even from this elevated or distant
perspective, the comments of the “giant” (Trollope, *Autobiography* 85) or narrator remain integral to the structure of the narrative as it is the provision of the accumulated details that allow the sustenance (of the appearance) of reality. This becomes especially interesting in light of Hawthorne’s description of Trollope’s fiction as “solid and substantial” (Trollope, *Autobiography* 85), giving the impression of there being a denseness of prose. Instead of prose packed full of stylistic flourishes, it is conversely Trollope’s close attention to minutiae and detail that contributes to this sense of there being something substantial. More significantly, that the characters are “being made a show of” (Trollope, *Autobiography* 85) points out how Trollope’s brand of realism is distinctively different from that of many of his realist counterparts such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. Trollope’s narrator often speaks with an underlying sense of irony, at times presenting characters through use of a comic mode that verges on the Dickensian in its exaggeration of particular characteristics. The intervening and sometimes ironic narrative presence has the effect of disrupting the realist mode by intermittently reminding the reader of his presence and the fictionality of the characters.

The disruptions that occur because of this narratorial presence then produce moments of “unreality” that recall the discussion of Trollope’s earlier fiction, *La Vendee*. While its sensational and unrealistic elements may be attributed to its being produced in the infancy of Trollope’s writing career, the appearance of such moments in a text such as *Framley Parsonage* points out how the realist mode repeatedly gives way to moments that do not appear credible or authentic. This is especially interesting considering the fact that *Framley Parsonage* was Trollope’s first commissioned serialisation, not only enabling him to reach a much larger reading audience (Hamer 4) but arguably also indicative of his being well established in his craft. As mentioned briefly, the pivotal yet continually shifting role of the third person narrator appears to be related to the larger workings of the realist mode and may
elucidate how the realist mode is sustained or disrupted throughout the course of the narrative. This role of the narrator begs for closer scrutiny especially because of the “undeniable pleasantness of the Trollopian narrator” whose tone and relatability often belie a “pervasively manipulative, complicated and ironic technique” (Lyons 41). While Paul Lyons is referring here to the narrator(s) in Trollope’s *The Warden* (1855) and *Barchester Towers* (1857), there appears to be a similarity that is carried over to the later produced *Framley Parsonage*.

Even before the narrative begins, the inclusion of the epigraph “Omnes omnia bona dicere” (Trollope 1) originally from the Roman comedy *Andria*, clues us into the narrator’s use of the comic mode. The literal meaning is provided in the first paragraph as the narrator explicates that “all men began to say all good things to him [Mark Robarts’ father]” (Trollope 1). On first reading, this appears as an affirmation of the “good things which chance and conduct together had heaped upon” (Trollope 1) one of the main protagonists of the novel, Mark Robarts. Yet in setting up a clear parallel between his father and Simo in *Andria*, who receives praises in relation to his son that are revealed to be unfounded, the narrator is slyly pointing out to us that Mark too will fail to live up to the expectations of his father and that of his position as a clergyman because of his subsequent dealings with Mr. Sowerby (Hansen). This ironic stance of the narrator, though more clearly apparent through knowledge of the context of the epigraph and through further reading of the text, is also made known through close attention to the nuances of the narrative structure. While the narrator might have chosen to realistically detail the compliments Mark’s father received on his son’s success, the narrator only makes a reference to the possibility of fatherly pride being taken in saying that the “father *might* well declare [emphasis added]” (Trollope 1). This has the effect of leading the reader to believe in the “catalogue of the good things” (Trollope 1) that follows, thus setting up a narrative situation that becomes all the more poignant and authentic when Mark’s
fortunes take a downward turn later in the text. More crucially, such a rhetorical gesture serves to present the narrator as one with omniscience in having knowledge of the lives and thoughts of his characters. This presentation of detail, an important characteristic of the realist mode, leads the reader into accepting the plausibility and ‘reality’ of the events recounted. Yet, paradoxically, it is this presentation of detail that can lead to the very moments of ‘unreality’ that disrupt the realist mode. This is most clearly seen when the narrator continues in explicitly stating that “the first page or two of this narrative must be consumed” (Trollope 1) in detailing the specificities of Mark’s life. Not only does this statement draw attention to the textuality of the fictional object, the narrator also highlights the fictionality of the characters and events that he describes by foregrounding the process of construction. While this may be especially apparent to the contemporary reader looking out for such narrative clues, the emphatic nature of the narrator’s articulation that it “must be” (Trollope 1) is by no means a hidden one. This prevents the reader from being fully ‘bought in’ to the fantasy of realism that is being presented. The focus on this preliminary chapter and its nuances is a necessary one as it is here that readers are first acquainted with the narrator of *Framley Parsonage* and the various devices that alternately work to sustain or subvert the ‘real’.

As the first chapter has shown, the narrator speaks not only apart from the events of the narrative but with a consciousness of his role in the narrative’s construction. This position of distance from the narrative is assumed once again when the narrator proposes “to follow the postman with that letter [by Mark to his wife] to Framley” (Trollope 43). As with before, the narrator is being ironic in saying that he does not want to follow the “circuitous route” even as he expressly does so in saying that the letter “went into Barchester by the Courcy night mail-car, which, on its road, passes through the villages of Uffley and Chaldicotes” (Trollope 43). The catalogue of the journey then continues although this is done not “by the
same mode of conveyance [as the letter]” (Trollope 43). There is the sense that a narrative trick has been played upon the reader as the narrator does in fact follow the “circuitous route” of the letter, albeit only by textual means. What this effectively does is to make a distinction between the spatial ‘reality’ within the narrative and textual reality that only serves to highlight the textuality and thus fictionality of the novel itself. While the narrator of *Framley Parsonage* appears to be engaged in the construction of the realist mode by providing the specificities of place in his detailing of the mail route, once again, paying attention to the nuances of the narrator’s words proves otherwise as a further layer of irony is added as the narrative progresses. We ultimately realise that the course described thus far is not part of “that letter’s destiny” (Trollope 44) as the letter does not reach Framley “exactly as Mrs. Robarts had finished reading prayers to the four servants” (Trollope 44) as we have been led to believe it would. The laborious detailing of the narrator that contributes to the novel’s realism thus comes to naught, prompting (at least) two interpretive paths that together reify the notion of the mode as one containing multiple tensions. Just as the tracking of the mail route may be read as a hint of the text’s own difficulties in sustaining the realistic mode of representation, it may just as easily be read as an adherence to the larger aim of its aesthetic mode in simulating the unpredictable nature of life (or reality) by emphasizing how even the narrator’s sustained efforts to detail the mail route can result in unfulfillment.

The position of the narrator thus appears as an almost paradoxical one. While the narrator’s knowledge allows the sustenance of the realist mode, it is the narrator’s revelling in this same omniscient knowledge and his ability to set up situations of narrative irony that result in the moments of ‘unreality’ that disrupt it.

3.2 The Bi-planar Narrator as Character and Guide

As the events of the narrative are related to us by the narrator along with the consequent and constant provision of detail that the mode entails, the importance of the narrator may also be
located in how his presence appears so palpable and ‘real’ that he appears almost like a character “whose personality is revealed progressively and whose acquaintance is part of the pleasure of the novel” (Lyons 46). This is most clearly seen when the narrator speaks from a position that appears less distant from the characters being described, such as when the narrator is “led into… the necessity of putting forward some sort of excuse” (Trollope 34) for the parson’s actions. There appears to be a personal engagement and input of the narrator’s feelings, as when he expresses “I should say” (Trollope 34) or “I think prudently” (Trollope 517), that makes him appear personable and more three dimensional instead of being merely an anonymous speaker within the text. This effectively presents the narrator as one who is able to remain congenial and warm even while speaking with a slight irony. Although it may be what entices the reader to remain in persistent engagement with the text, the tone of the narrator can also result in problems for the text in the larger consideration of its aesthetic mode. As Lyons points out, that a narrator is a character “in his own fictional world forces investigation of his reliability” (47). The interjections of the narrator’s personal opinions necessarily impacts the authority of his own omniscient knowledge by revealing a lack of objectivity, calling into question the veracity of the myriad details provided (by him). While this has the effect of underscoring once again the difficulty of sustaining the realist mode completely, the way this narrator is “characterised” also allows Trollope to combine aspects of realism (or unreality as it may be) with the comic mode, especially in the presentation of particular characters.

That even the most dramatic of *Framley Parsonage’s* subplots are represented in moderate terms appears to substantiate how Trollope’s “emphasis was on character and story, more the former than the latter” (Levine 5). A case in point is one of its primary plot lines, the romance between Lord Lufton and Lucy Robarts. The urge towards resolution of their plot does not depend upon fervent embraces in the garden nor a torrid courtship against Lady
Lufton’s wishes. Instead, the reader is pressed to read on through an admiration for Lucy and Lord Lufton as they are characters that are fully-rounded and authentic to the reader. This satisfies the criterion of formal realism to produce the “individuality of the actors concerned” (Watt 222). This sense of credulity towards them is one that is engendered in part by the narrator. Once again, the narrator affably addresses the reader in saying “I may as well confess that of absolute, true heroism there was only a moderate mixture in Lord Lufton’s composition” (Trollope 228). This disavowal of heroic qualities for one of the novel’s main players is indicative of the novel’s commitment to realism. Lord Lufton is able to appear ‘real’ and likeable precisely because of this characterisation of him as fundamentally human in his lack of heroism and his occasional profligacy.

3.3 The Comic and Caricature

It becomes surprising then, in a fictional world filled with such fully developed characters, to encounter characters that appear closer to caricatures that produce moments of hilarity instead of a sense of their authenticity. This identification of the comic mode in Trollope’s novels has not gone unnoticed (Nardin 2002, Kincaid 1970). The comic in Framley Parsonage surfaces most clearly in the presentation of the Proudies. Just as names have come to be recognised as important for most of Dickens’ characters, so too does their family name clue us into the nature of their characterisation especially when compared to the other characters in the novel that are more conventionally named. Mrs. Proudie is presented as a domineering character who often speaks peremptorily to her husband the bishop in “a rather sharp voice, to which he instantly attended” (Trollope 32). This dominance of Mrs. Proudie becomes the couple’s defining characteristic even if it is only ever hinted at by the narrator. The comic nature of their married relations becomes more pronounced precisely because it is not explicitly conveyed that Mrs. Proudie has such power over her husband. Instead, this is once again subtly disclosed to us by the ironic narrator as he frames the bishop’s backing out of his
commitment to be part of the hunting party at Chaldicotes as a result of the couple having “discussed the matter in private” (Trollope 36). The placement of the clauses suggests the cause-and-effect of events and introduces subtle humour by pointing out the extent of the wife’s dominance over the husband. That the bishop is constantly referred to in terms of his position within the church and not by his name only emphasizes the contrast existing between his public and private positions. These comedic moments surrounding the Proudies effectively emphasizes the fundamental nature of the text as a work of fiction and its resultant need to continually entertain the reader. This is especially so for this work of Trollope’s as there is evidently a need to sustain readership throughout the process of serialisation that *Framley Parsonage* went through. While these moments may not necessarily disrupt the realist mode (in fact, the state of the Proudies’ dynamics may be comedic precisely because they ring true), they certainly point to how the realist novel is never completely realist in essence.

This becomes clear considering the instances where the comic is pronounced to such an extent that it may be seen to disrupt the authenticity of the ‘world’ within *Framley Parsonage*. This occurs when Mrs. Proudie’s dominance asserts itself once again as she interrupts Mr. Harold Smith’s lecture to become “now the hero of the hour” (Trollope 67). The event that occasions Mark Robarts’ integration into the Chaldicotes set despite his patron’s displeasure thus descends into an almost farcical situation, as Mrs. Proudie shouts and expounds on the Christian mission “to the great amazement of the assembled people” (Trollope 67). The later presentation of Mrs. Proudie at breakfast with the parson does nothing to mitigate this idea of her as being placed within the narrative as a figure of hilarity. The “inflexibility of her general appearance” and the various elements of her attire, such as how “she had encased her feet in large carpet slippers” plays up Mark’s view of her as being “strange and unsightly” (Trollope 71). This, added to the reader’s previous encounter with
her, imbues her character with a sense of the exaggerated instead of the authentic. The physical description of her in this setting also appears closer to some of Dickens’ descriptions, recalling characters such as Wemmick with his memorable ‘post-box’ mouth from *Great Expectations* (1861). It is crucial to remember that pointing out how the Proudies may be seen more as caricatures than characters does not necessarily translate to a failure on the part of the text to produce fully-individualised characters. As the previous sections have shown, the textual mode understandably fails in a full representation of reality. Rather, the identification of comic elements points out how a narrow definition of the realist mode is necessarily bound to fail, either through its combination with other modes or through the ways in which a sense of authenticity is sustained. Another consideration to note in the representation of characters such as the Proudies is that *Framley Parsonage* is but one of the novels in the *The Chronicles of Barsetshire*. There is the possibility that these characters become much more developed in the other novels of the series where they play a more central role, such as in *Barchester Towers* (1857). The identification of them by such singular characteristics may thus be borne out of necessity. They cannot be fully developed simply because the main plot of the novel is concerned with the events and characters of the parsonage itself.
4. Tooth and Claw

“She’d like me to bring a dragon home, I suppose. It would serve her right if I did—some creature that would make the house intolerable to her.” (Trollope 473)

The line above, not only comes from Framley Parsonage but also forms part of the prefatory material for its contemporary (fantastical) counterpart, Jo Walton’s Tooth and Claw.

Walton’s explicit statement in the foreword that the text “owes a lot to Anthony Trollope’s Framley Parsonage” (5), indicates the indebtedness of the written work and positions the text as part of the neo-Victorian in its refashioning of the events and characters of the antecedent text. Tooth and Claw, the winner of the World Fantasy Award in 2004, serves as particular proof of the ascendance of the neo-Victorian genre that was touched upon earlier. The line quoted gains new meaning after a reading of Tooth and Claw where all of Trollope’s human characters are swopped for dragons even as the broad outlines of some of its subplots are retained. One of the most notable differences between Framley Parsonage and Tooth and Claw is in the representation of the death of the parson’s father. The depiction of the venerable dragon Bon Argonin on his deathbed marks the beginning of the narrative, gaining especial significance with the realisation that the death of the patriarch is not included within the diegesis of Framley Parsonage. Even as the event is represented differently through the two texts, its importance is undeniable as it is this death that may be said to occasion the romance between the Lord Lufton and Lucy Robarts figures in both the Victorian and neo-Victorian texts. The importance of his death is made more evident in Walton’s text not only by the fact of its inclusion within the diegesis but also by its placement in the narrative as Bon Argonin’s death sets off a chain of events that includes (but is not limited to) the threat to the parson’s position, the necessary separation of his defenceless daughters and not least, the ritual eating of his dragon carcass. As will be explicated throughout this section, other
than literally giving the event primacy by virtue of its placement, *Tooth and Claw* also continues in the same vein figuratively by bringing to the forefront issues that are arguably latent in the text it reimagines.

4.1 New Perspectives from the neo-Victorian

To map out further the various plot points and ways that *Tooth and Claw* reimagines *Framley Parsonage*, shifts the focus away from the more crucial point of what this refashioning manages to accomplish. Instead, adopting Gutleben and Onega’s concept of refraction as a “double process involving the ways in which a text exploits and integrates both the reflections of a previous text and the new light shed on the original work by its rewriting”, there is an attempt to “reveal interesting new shades of meaning that were not at all evident from earlier one-sided analyses” (7). This way of looking at the intertextual relations between these works “obliterates any hierarchical or evaluative distinction between two related texts – however canonical one of the two might be.” (Gutleben and Onega 9) and emphasises the bi-directional relation two texts may have. While *Tooth and Claw* can draw upon *Framley Parsonage* as a source for revision, the existence of the contemporary rewriting can also have implications for the way the earlier text is read. Returning once again to the quote at the beginning of the section gives proof of how this “double process” (Gutleben and Onega 7) may be at work. Evidently, the inclusion of this quote as paratext highlights how this line, said by Lord Lufton in response to his mother’s objection to Lucy Robarts as an eligible choice for her son, is utilised and literalised. In fact, it goes further by extending this actualisation of his words to all the characters in the text, making them dragons “red in tooth and claw” (Walton 7). There is a clever irony in the decision to literalise or make ‘real’ an element of a purportedly realist text and in so doing, alter the way it may be generically classified. This transformative act not only transposes the various subplots of *Framley*
Parsonage to the fantastic mode but carries implications for its realist predecessor. By having its players made dragons, Walton is not only able to point out the nuances of social practices in the Victorian period but also provides a comparison for how the same events may be imaginatively made different by virtue of the apparently incompatible modes that they utilise. Just as the realist framework of Framley Parsonage has been shown to be intermittently disrupted by its ironic and comic narrator, what the clearly developed fictional world of Tooth and Claw conveys is a sense of believability despite its being entirely inhabited by fantastic characters. This effectively destabilises the idea of the real and the fantastic as being diametrically opposed concepts as the reading of these pendant texts help to uncover just how far they both are an amalgamation of the two.

4.2 The ‘Inner Consistency of Reality’ in the Fantastic Mode

As Thomas A. Wendorf points out in his discussion of the fictions of J.R Tolkien and Graham Greene (both celebrated for their proficiency in the fantasy and realist modes respectively), fantasy and realism are “not mutually exclusive modes of writing” but rather are “by necessity, mutually related” (84). This way of looking at these modes ties in with Tolkien’s theorisation on the fantasy mode, that it demands an “inner consistency of reality” (Tolkien, qtd. in Wendorf 84) for it to be believable and engaging. Even as Tooth and Claw is undoubtedly a fantasy in its representation of a civilisation made up entirely of dragons, there is also a strong sense of authenticity that is brought across by the fully realised nature of this fictional world. The text is thus exemplar of the distinction that is to be made between “realism of presentation” where something is made “palpable and vivid, by sharply observed or sharply imagined detail” and “realism of content” which requires a fiction to be “probable or true to life” (Lewis, qtd. in Wendorf 79). The provision of minute details such as the existence of “gutters on the floor” (Walton 141) of the dining room expressly for the purpose
of collecting excess blood from each meal as well as the dragonets’ lack of table manners in being “inclined to scatter gobbets of bloody meat everywhere as they ate[eat]” (Walton 137) not only makes no excuse for the nature of the dragons’ eating habits but also works towards this “realism of presentation” even if no such dining room exists in reality.

Other than the use of such details, the success of this “realism of presentation” is also achieved by providing the reader with insight into the various aspects that sustain the “inner consistency” of the fictional world of Tiamath. In this sense, the world contained in Tooth and Claw may be said to be more fully fleshed out (and hence more real?) than the world of Framley Parsonage. One of the foremost concerns of Trollope’s work is the state of the clergy, thus Framley Parsonage describes the sense of indebtedness and lack of autonomy that Mark Robarts faces in having Lady Lufton as his patroness. Yet the alternative of not having such a patron proves to be at least as difficult as Mark’s circumstances (if not more so), as exemplified by the trying conditions of Mr. Crawley and his family. While this is conveyed through the comparison of both men, this preoccupation with church politics often takes the form of the narrator’s interjections that disrupt the flow of the narrative and can produce the moments of “unreality” that were discussed earlier.

While Tooth and Claw also deals with this issue of the parsons being bound by their stations, its treatment of the matter is different by having their wings literally “bound with the red cord” (Walton 12). This red cord is a multivalent signifier as it symbolises “the parson’s dedication to gods and dragonkind” to the pious while denoting “mere immunity” (Walton 12) to others. More crucially perhaps, is the explicit parallel it draws between these members of the church to the indentured servants that are subordinate to gentle-dragons such as Daverak and Blessed Penn himself. The significance of this forbiddance of flight becomes more apparent as “the joy of flight” (Walton 104) is palpable in such descriptions of “two
such beautiful dragons cavorting across the open sky as if it belonged to them” (Walton 105). The astute reader can thus draw the connections between this and the literal binding of the clergy-dragon’s wings without having the narrator didactically expound on their sacrifices or circumscribed positions.

While *Framley Parsonage* is chiefly concerned with the politics of the church and its clergy, the convention of literalising used as part of the fantasy framework in *Tooth and Claw* allows for a multitude of issues to be addressed. This validates the existence of its fictional world and its complexities that simulate reality instead of presenting a fictional world that is one-dimensional. Other than the obvious change in the genus of the characters, this literalising occurs in a number of other instances. This is most strikingly done in having the scales of the female dragons follow the biological imperative of turning colour according to their proximity or level of engagement with male dragons. Such a convention may be traced back to the frequency of Lucy’s “blushing ruby red through every vein of her deep-tinted face” (Trollope 177) in *Framley Parsonage* as her courtship with Lord Lufton progresses.

Yet while Lucy’s blushes indicate her sense of propriety, the permanent change in colour for female dragons in *Tooth and Claw* speaks of more dire consequences. Selendra is shown to undergo a traumatic experience as Blessed Frelt “leaned closer still… well aware that she was a maiden dragon and could be awakened to love by such closeness” (Walton 48), causing her to involuntarily alternate from her natural maiden state of being gold-scaled to the pink of the emotionally (and sexually) awakened female dragon. As Haner rightly points out, maidens not only have to lose gold in the form of their natural colour but also in the dowry that they have to offer (Walton 56), adding further to the disadvantages that the female dragon faces in the course of her life. Throughout the novel, Walton is thus able to show up the particular difficulties of women in Victorian society and the importance of their having strictly
prescribed social positions. That the “thought of what could be done with a sister who was neither maiden nor wife hung heavily” (Walton 53) upon Selendra’s brothers indicates how *Tooth and Claw* utilises the trope of the ruined woman that is common to many Victorian novels.

While Selener is eventually shown to be able to recover her maiden colour (and thus her honour) by drinking a tea made by her trusty old servant Amer, the collective dismay and trepidation at Selener’s change indicates just how terrible the fate of a female dragon without a ‘respectable’ place in society can be. Avan’s own mistress, Sebeth, is tragically “tormented… with his [a kidnapper’s] presence, causing her to blush” (Walton 81) and rendering her unsuitable for marriage. She is then forced to become “a streetwalker who could refuse no stranger who offered her gold” (Walton 81) and is only able to achieve a semblance of domestic bliss by cohabiting with Avan. That the change in colour is an embodied reaction brought about primarily through physical contact, allows Walton to explicitly acknowledge female sexuality, which is more often than not either omitted from or deeply embedded within a Victorian text such as Trollope’s. This may be attributed to how the politics of the church remains the first and foremost concern of *Framley Parsonage*. What is more crucial to our discussion of the aesthetic modes of both texts is the effect of their individual frameworks. Unlike *Framley Parsonage*, the engagement with various issues in *Tooth and Claw* occurs throughout the presentation of the diegesis rather than the narrator’s interjections. The realist aesthetic is thus maintained despite its fantastic content. The engagement with a variety of issues also projects a sense of authenticity in its rendering of the complexity of this fictional world. Should readers wish to supplement any gaps in their knowledge regarding this fantastic world, there exists the “Tooth and Claw Role-Playing Game”, a guide (with added material by the author) that purports to be a detailed sourcebook
for the novel. The existence of such a resource, points to the believability and affective capability of the text, so much so that there is the desire to extend the reading experience.

More significantly, that the sourcebook contains scenarios for role playing adds further dimensions of relatedness between the fantastic and the ‘real’. A work of fictional fantasy is literally made real as readers act out these scenarios. Yet as they do so, a further element of fictionality is added as role-playing games are effectively games that require readers to creatively tell stories and extend scenarios while still abiding by the tenets of the fictional world of *Tooth and Claw*.

While it has been established that the narrator of *Tooth and Claw* does more in the way of ‘showing’ than ‘telling’ the reader, that is not to say that the narrator never interjects into the narrative. Rather, this happens on a significantly reduced scale compared to the Trollopian narrator. One such instance occurs in the very last chapter of the book where “The narrator is forced to confess to having lost count of both proposals and confessions” (Walton 319). This chapter title correlates with the previous titles in slyly pointing towards the conventions of the Victorian novel by tracking the number of marriage proposals and confessions that are made as they occur throughout the narrative. The comic element becomes more apparent to the reader who has knowledge of such conventions but also indicates how the stance of the narrator here is more earnest than the disingenuousness of Trollope’s narrator. As has been established, the ironic tone of the Trollopian narrator can work towards a disruption of the sense of the ‘real’. Instead of disrupting the realist mode, the interjections by the narrator of *Tooth and Claw* are different as they actually work towards maintaining this sense of authenticity by extending it outside of the fictional frame towards the reader. When the narrator addresses us as “gentle readers and not cruel and hungry readers who would visit a publisher’s offices with the intention of rending and eating
an author who had displeased them” (Walton 264), he is literally engaging us in the fantasy by positing that we as readers are in fact dragons. Undoubtedly, the reader cannot achieve a complete suspension of reality by forgetting the fundamental fact of his own humanity yet this entreaty is not only comical but effective as a strategy. The reader is better placed to accept the conventions of the fantastic and its ‘unrealism of content’ if these fantastic elements are normalised such that the dragons themselves are seen as realistic creatures.

4.3 Fantasy’s use of the Comic

Another difference to be discerned between the narrators of both these texts is in their use of the comic. As the above examples show, the narrator’s earnest entreaties and confessions can create moments of comedy. Yet, the humour here differs greatly from that of Trollope’s narrator as the comic in Framley Parsonage arises out of the narrator’s ironic stance and his caricaturizing of characters such as Mrs. Proudie. Such an approach, while entertaining to the reader, repeatedly emphasizes the presence of the narrator and his gentle mocking. This results in a heightening sense of the text’s constructedness that can only work against the realist aesthetic. While the character of Mrs. Proudie invokes laughter because of her ridiculous behaviour that stretches the limits of believability, the characters within Tooth and Claw can also help to create comedy, albeit in a very different way. This use of the comic is accomplished when Amer wryly says to Selendra that if she is “not crying to be gold, you’re [she is] crying to be pink” (Walton 224) after Selendra’s scales fail to turn pink despite her affection and close contact with Sher. The humour here lies in Amer’s words having an element of truth to them while also presenting her as a character who is funny by nature instead of necessarily having an ironic narrator create humour at the expense of the characters he presents. This way of describing an undeniably fictional character appears odd but attests to how believable Amer is as a character. It also underscores how one might argue that the
use of the narrator here may be more successful than that of *Framley Parsonage*’s in the presentation of authentic characters and by extension, the maintenance of the realist mode.

The sense of authenticity that comes with Amer’s humour is replicated in the presentation of Londaver, the dragon that Haner eventually marries. The description of him as being “no dragon out of legend” but “considerate and not cruel” (Walton 201) distinctly recalls Trollope’s description of Lord Lufton in its similar disavowal of heroism. As established earlier, this sense of the characters as fallibly human or dragon instead of implausibly ideal works towards the sustenance of the realist mode by producing characters that are believable. Where these two descriptions deviate is in the role of the narrator. The Trollopian narrator, while convincing the reader of Lord Lufton’s ‘ordinary’ mettle, is only able to do so by asserting his presence in saying “I may as well confess” (Trollope 228). There is then a tension between the ‘real’ and the unrealistic even within the same sentence. While the impulse appears to tend towards convincing the reader of the believability of a figure such as Lord Lufton, the actual practice emphasizes the fictionality of the text by highlighting the narrator’s being in the act of narration. Conversely, Walton’s narrator unobtrusively lays out Londaver’s qualities, allowing the continued sustenance of the realistic mode. That both Londaver and Amer are consistently authentic despite being such minor characters makes the point that aesthetic realism may inform *Tooth and Claw* more fully than initially assumed.
5. Conclusion

This paper started out with the identification of the neo-Victorian’s ascendance and the investigation of the relations between neo-Victorian texts and their predecessors. As has been noted, the fantasy framework in *Tooth and Claw* is set up through the convention of ‘literalising’ that occurs on various levels of the narrative. This convention allows the neo-Victorian text to address many issues latent in its predecessor that can in some way, cause the narrative to appear more realistic in its complexity.

While both *Framley Parsonage* and *Tooth and Claw* may be said to follow the same rough plotlines, one of the most glaring differences between them is in the way they are generically classified. Narrowing its focus, the discussion of both texts uncovered how the relations of the realist and fantasy modes may be closer than supposed by the literal associations given to their names. The close attention to detail, one of the key markers of the realist mode, has been shown to be at least as important (if not more so) to the success of the fantasy narrative. After all, the furnishing of details results in a more fully realised depiction of a fantasy world that works towards its believability.

Considering the importance of details then leads us to closely examine the roles of the narrators in both texts as not only do these narrators provide these details, they also help to form the linkages amongst these minutiae. The way their narrative situations are set up and sustained by these narrators throughout the course of the texts can work in opposition to the aesthetic modes with which they are most obviously identified. While the role of the narrator is pivotal for the reading of any narrative, both texts have demonstrated that this is especially important for the literary construction of reality. Perhaps where the Trollopian narrator fails in this reality-construction may be located in the ironic stance that is adopted as this sense of irony conveys a fundamental disbelief in the actions and specificities of the characters and
events that are being described. Conversely, the earnest tone of the narrator in *Tooth and Claw* embodies a faith in its fantastic fictional world that contributes to its verisimilitude, thereby closing the gap between the fantastic and the realistic. That the role of the narrator is so pivotal in reality-construction also points out how it is the material depiction of these fictional worlds that contribute mostly to the way they are generically classified and the usual assumption that the realist and the fantastic are poles apart.

Ultimately though, the believability of this neo-Victorian text does not attest to any aesthetic failing of its predecessor. Instead, what it underscores is how the existence of the neo-Victorian can provide the impetus to rethink the generic claims of Victorian texts to realism. The ability of this new subgenre to induce new viewpoints occurs at the level of the narrative as well, as readers coming to *Framley Parsonage* with knowledge of *Tooth and Claw* may be more attuned to the underlying issues of its chronological precedent. It also affirms the suitability of the ‘neo-Victorian’ as a term that not only indicates this growing subgenre but its propensity to provide new ways of reading.

The range of complexity that both these works embody is such that not only do they elude easy categorisation, it also attests to how their worth should be considered beyond their popularity and their function as entertainment. A good case in point is the role that humour plays in both texts. The moments of humour that occur throughout both narratives become imbued with greater importance. The scope of this paper meant that the identification of comic elements in both novels were brought up primarily for the way they help to sustain or disrupt the sense of plausibility produced throughout the course of the narrative. That laughter often arises “from the sudden perception of some superiority in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others” that serves as a “welcome escape from the everyday” (Hume 68) attests to the close links that the comic mode has with notions of the
‘real’ and the fantastic. This “perception of some superiority” also highlights the association of humour to politics in its subversion of hierarchy. It also clues us into the reasons for the Trollopian narrator’s successful use of the comic as his ironic and distancing stance allows him to gently ridicule the events and characters of the narrative that he is describing.

While the political implications of the comic presence in both *Framley Parsonage* and *Tooth and Claw* regrettably appears out of the purview of this paper, it is evident that further research on the intersections between politics, comedy and the respective genres of the chosen texts could bear interesting results. That said, not only has the discussion of both texts demonstrated the affinities that exist between the realist and fantastic modes. More importantly, it has underscored how the neo-Victorian is not only relevant but necessary in its ability to provide renewed ways of thinking not only of its Victorian predecessors but also of the generic modes that they are placed in.

(9, 829 words)
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Works Consulted


Anthony Trollope, Framley Parsonage, 1859. Tooth and Claw. 1. The Death of Bon Agornin. He delicately reached out a claw and ate both eyes, as was always the parson's part. Only then did he call his sibs, with the ritual cry, ‘The good dragon Bon Agornin has begun his journey towards the light, let the family be gathered to feast!’ He felt no grief, no shame at having gone against the teachings of the Church to give his father absolution, no horror at what his father had done. Framley Parsonage is a novel by English author Anthony Trollope. It was first published in serial form in the Cornhill Magazine in 1860, then in book form in 1861. It is the fourth book in the Chronicles of Barsetshire series, preceded by Doctor Thorne and followed by The Small House at Allington. The hero of Framley Parsonage, Mark Robarts, is a young vicar, settled in the village of Framley in Barsetshire with his wife and children. The living has come into his hands through Lady Lufton, the mother Framley Parsonage is the fourth novel in Anthony Trollope’s Chronicles of Barsetshire series. I’ve been slowly working my way through these books during the last year and in my opinion this one is neither the best nor the worst of the four I’ve read so far. A common question asked by people new to Trollope’s Framley Parsonage consists of two main storylines. In the first, we follow Mark Robarts, the vicar of Framley. You might want to look into Tooth and Claw as a companion read: Jo Walton (the author) was inspired to write a book imagining that the gender expectations of Victorian England were biological facts, so Tooth and Claw is a loose retelling of Framley Parsonage but with dragons. Helen says: September 11, 2011 at 2:34 pm. Reply. Framley Parsonage by Anthony Trollope. view history. Common Knowledge. Tooth and Claw. Jo Walton burst onto the fantasy scene with The King’s Peace, acclaimed by writers as diverse as Poul Anderson, Robin Hobb, and Ken MacLeod. In 2002, she was voted the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. Except that everyone in the story is a dragon, red in tooth and claw. Here is a world of politics and train stations, of churchmen and family retainers, of courtship and country houses...in which, on the death of an elder, family members gather to eat the body of the deceased. In which society’s high-and-mighty members avail themselves of the privilege of killing and eating the weaker children, which they do with ceremony and relish, growing stronger thereby.