

Drawing *Dispossession*

A new graphic adaptation of Anthony Trollope's novel *John Caldigate*

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Dispossession (2015) is a 96 page colour graphic adaptation of Anthony Trollope's 1879 novel *John Caldigate*. It is the primary outcome of a 2012 commission from the University of Leuven to develop, draw and rationalise a new graphic novel relative to Trollope's (Fig. 1). *Dispossession* will be published in an English edition, and as *Courir deux lièvres* (To run two hares) in a French edition, in support of a 2015 academic conference on the occasion of the bicentenary of Trollope's birth.¹ The commission encompassed theorisations of adaptation, the habits and limitations of research and practice, narrative drawing and Victorianism. An academic partner volume, *Transforming Anthony Trollope: 'Dispossession', Victorianism and 19th century word and image* (2015), published at the same time, will include new writing on the graphic adaptation of 19th century literature, Victorian illustration and Victorianism.²

Two questions guided the creation of *Dispossession*: what results when the formal and discursive constraints of the comics register are self-consciously reformed in the process of adaptation, the protocol for a new book deriving from an analysis of Trollope's text relative to the its time and ours and; how might a new book visualise equivocation in its facture, distinct from the depiction of a plot? The approach to adaptation underwritten by these questions assumed particular types of knowledge on the part of readers of the new book, of its relationship to Trollope's text and aspects of the 19th century, and its relationships with a range of conventions of comic strips. On one hand, these types of knowledge suggest that the formal characteristics of a new book will be meaningful and, on the other hand, that the relationships between different habits of reading (of a 19th century novel and a 21st century graphic novel) will also be significant. Both anticipate a 'knowing' reader, to use Linda Hutcheon's term, whose habits of reading and formal knowledge are self-conscious, that is, located within a wider field of known alternative behaviour and experiences.³

Because of the framing of these questions, the plotting of *Dispossession* was the least complex task facing the adaptation. Conceiving the new plot at the level of a script, before dividing the action or considering the ways in which form and facture might embody it, plotting came to rely upon historic verisimilitude,

alongside the ethics and experience of a 21st century reader of Trollope's text, as the twin lenses through which the new plot would be produced.⁴ Knowledge of 19th century history, material culture, society and ethics was arbitrated, benchmarked, even, by my own 21st century sensibility. As method, one type of knowledge reciprocally constrained the other. This meant that, although I might decide to change Trollope's course of events to affect a contemporary reader, I had to ensure that that change either maintained or deepened verisimilitude. Similarly, as my knowledge of the 19th century increased, I was able to employ a radical verisimilitude concerning aspects of the historic past, absent from *John Caldigate*, as keynotes for the adaptation.

The plot of *John Caldigate* proceeds along these lines: it is 1873. John Caldigate, a young Cambridgeshire gentleman, accrues gambling debts whilst at University and decides to try his luck in the gold fields of New South Wales, Australia. On ship, he meets and promises to marry Mrs Smith, a divorced actress. Quickly striking gold, he becomes her business partner in a successful mine. Three years later he returns to Cambridgeshire and marries Hester, his sweetheart. Mrs Smith returns from Australia, penniless, and claims that she is already his wife. The mainspring of the plot lies in the plausibility, for a 19th century reader, of presenting Australia as a place in which the conventions of European society are overturned, ignored or daily reformed. Viewed from Cambridgeshire, it is socially, as well as geographically, upside-down. '... to marry me might be - ruin.' Smith says to Caldigate. Only '... among the connections of home life.' he replies (Fig 2).⁵ In *John Caldigate*, Australia provides Cambridgeshire people with the idea of both extreme license and invisibility, as long as details of what occurs in Australia stay in Australia. Apart from a brief introduction to the privations, social coarseness and rigours of European New South Wales, information about the three year long Australian episode is only provided to the reader retrospectively by Trollope, when the protagonists return to England and variously describe what has occurred. It is from the contradictions in these accounts that the plot, which is exclusively concerned with the impacts that they have upon English social life, derives.

Comparing the plot of *Dispossession* to the plot of *John Caldigate*, there are a number of important excisions, elisions and additions. These differences were produced less for the practical reasons of condensing a text novel of around 600 pages to a graphic one of around 100, than on the grounds of

providing absolute comprehensibility, plausibility and balance in the new plot for the reader of the graphic novel, or even a sense of the artfulness of the production of this balance. The production of these differences intended to override some of the difficulties that occur in Trollope's plot for a contemporary reader. Foremost among these difficulties is the absence from the plot of *John Caldigate* of particular groups of people who populated New South Wales in the 1870s, and whose absence is implausible for contemporary readers of fiction set in the period: Aboriginal Australians, Chinese miners and soldiers, in particular.

It is likely that the omission of these people from Trollope's plot would not have seemed implausible for British readers in the 1870s. However, it is difficult to assess precisely what information about life in Australia constituted public or 'adult novel-reader' knowledge and the category is itself tendentious. More productive is the idea that Trollope honed his plot for a readership with which he was very familiar, and in whose estimation, at this late stage in his prolific career, he was expected to produce plots of a particular sort. Trollope travelled to Australia twice and wrote about his travels. He had first-hand experience of the social and colonial environment that he largely omits from *John Caldigate*. He also had first-hand experience of inter-continental travel, by sail and steam-assisted sail on ships from England to Australia, where a journey would last up to 90 days without landfall and, during which, births and deaths were entirely unremarkable. His fictional gloss on the conditions of life on board ship contrasts vividly with contemporary accounts from passengers' letters and journals, leading to speculation about the knowledge of his readers. He writes: 'On board ship there are many sources of joy of which the land knows nothing. You may flirt and dance at sixty; and if you are awkward in the turn of a valse, you may put it down to the motion of the ship. You need wear no gloves, and may drink your soda-and-brandy without being ashamed of it...'⁶ However, actual passengers' accounts are more forthright: 'A poor little child died last night... and the girls said they were going to throw it overboard, but I thought they would be sure to read prayers over it but not so, they opened the Surgeon's window and threw it out.'(Fig. 3)⁷

The gravity of Trollope's plot is located in the social world of middle- and upper class Cambridgeshire. For his readers, it was plausible that this pervasive milieu situated every other person, locale and experience in the world in its own terms. It is a colonial milieu in which colonies, colonial life and the lives of the

colonised are often abstractions for those at 'home'. Caldigate himself carries this milieu with him wherever he goes, enabling him to embark with impunity upon a mining career on the other side of a world of which he knows very little. Trollope is concerned only with the relationships between people within the milieu of Caldigate's home and class, and with people at the social boundaries of this world (such as the money-lender Davies, Smith or Holt the tenant farmer). In this world, as described in *John Caldigate*, aboriginal Australians and Chinese miners play no part. However, what were plausible, unknowing or even expected, omissions for Trollope's readers in 1879 would be deeply implausible and consequently meaningful to readers of any contemporary novel set in 19th century Australia.

In *Dispossession*, I created a new Aboriginal plot to parallel and elide Trollope's European plot. Rather than simply including Aboriginal people as a passing presence in a substantially European plot, in the Australian episodes, I considered the creation of a fictional Aboriginal world to be a major opportunity to make the graphic novel both more complex and more challenging. In particular, in *Dispossession*, the verisimilitude of the Aboriginal world contributes to the sense of unfamiliarity between the reader and the period, of a different order to our distance from the European 'Victorians', which is partly traversed for us through the agency of the costume dramas and remediations with which we are inevitably familiar.

The Aboriginal world of the 1870s was geographically demarcated as much by language as anything else.⁸ In terms of verisimilitude, I was fortunate in the fact that the geography of Trollope's Australian plot, apart from a journey from Melbourne in the south to New South Wales in the East, lay within an area largely permeated, at the time, by speakers of the Wiradjuri language. Consequently, it seemed to me that the inclusion of Wiradjuri characters demanded the use of the Wiradjuri language to establish a pervasive structure of relative proximities: the distance between the Wiradjuri world and the European world in Australia, and between the reader and a fiction of 19th century Australia. Further, the historic seasonal hunting, gleaning, gathering and trading habits of the Wiradjuri allowed my new characters and Trollope's Europeans to be in close proximity in both the Gold Fields, the fictional mining town of Nobble (Grenfell) and in Sydney (Fig. 4). The visual storyboard regime, which I will describe and discuss in detail later in the chapter, provided the opportunity for the Wiradjuri

characters and the European characters to pass mutually unacknowledged within feet of each other. The different orders of impact that they have upon each other and upon Australia is clear in the status that characters from each group ascribe to each other and to things around them: land, clothing, gold, lyrebird feathers, steel and stone knives, husbands and wives. The historic Waridjuri custom of polygamous marriage also provided opportunities for counterpoint between the European and Wiradjuri plots. According to custom, Gulpilil's unhappy wife Garuu is able to leave her marriage and marry another husband, simply by deciding she is no longer married.⁹ She is her husband's strict equal in this sense. Not so with the Europeans, only feet away but inhabiting a very different world (Fig. 4).

Trollope never tells us if Caldigate and Smith were married or not. The relevant parts of his plot, describing a period of 3 years in which Caldigate consolidates a gold strike by going into partnership with Smith in a mine and returning home a wealthy man, are told very briefly, in retrospect, by Caldigate, his father and members of the Bolton, Shand and Babbington families in Cambridgeshire. However, the visual storyboarding regime in *Dispossession* suggested that a scene could clearly show a course of events that distance renders ambiguous. In the graphic novel, Caldigate and Smith seem to be getting married in a scenario that takes place across four panels, but they could as plausibly be playing at getting married. What ARE they doing, laughing uproariously, drinking and reciting vows with (is that...) a priest outside that tent at the gold fields? If it were a marriage, would Anna Young laugh out loud at one of the most solemn moments in the ceremony? Is it a joke or an actual marriage? *Dispossession* never allows the reader to get close enough to be able to decide.¹⁰

Another emanation of the new plot is the adaptation's change of title from *John Caldigate* to *Dispossession* in English and *Courir deux lièvres* in French. Trollope's eponymous title is today profoundly anonymous, despite following a sustained fashion in the 18th and 19th centuries for eliding character and plot by naming novels after their main protagonists (for example, *Pamela*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Daniel Deronda*). The functions of titles of contemporary novels of English middle-class life provided me with a model. Whereas Trollope's title associates the world of the novel and the narrator with Caldigate, making his progress define the whole production, Trollope's modern heirs, such as Joanna Trollope and Patrick Gale, for example, utilise titles to both summarise and comment upon what they have written. The graphic novel's subtitle, 'A novel of

few words', operates in this way, both as a summary of the assumed status of this genre of comic strip as literature (a novel) and as commentary on its dominant image content. The title *Dispossession* makes a literal inter-textual reference a part of both this summation and this commentary. I hope that that other novel of social, literary and visual relationships between the 19th century and the present, A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990) will be recalled for readers by the graphic novel's title.¹¹ Further, it is possible that this association will recall the summary of intents now associated with Byatt's novel by readers: the questions 'who and what possess and are possessed?' in her novel transform seamlessly into the question 'dispossessed by whom, of what?' in *Dispossession*.

In French, there was another set of challenges. The English word 'dispossession' has no French equivalent that maps the same or even similar nuances, and not only because contemporary novels of English life are themselves transformed in French. I sought a more general summary of one of the central issues of the plot, and looked to common French language proverbs to provide one. Fortunately, the graphic novel's central question of the existence or not of a bigamous marriage, and Gilpilil's loss of Garuu, found both summation and commentary in the proverb 'Il ne faut jamais courir deux lièvres à la fois' (you can't run two hares at once or, in English, 'you can't do two things at once'). Both titles, *Dispossession* and *Courir deux lièvres*, offer summaries and commentaries on the plot and style of the book that are comprehensible, available and expansive as titles of a new graphic novel. They locate the unopened book amongst others and accumulate reflective possibilities that immediately direct reading.

More complex than rationalising changes to the plot, however, in visioning the world of *Dispossession*, was the development of a number of rules to govern the graphic novel's visual storyboard, that is, the prefiguring, at planning stage, of the ways in which the reader relates to the action in each panel and the way in which panels relate to each other. I am using the term 'storyboard' to describe a post-script, pre-facture visual plan of the layout of the whole book, indicating not only what is seen, when it is seen and how it is seen in the showing of the plot, but also how the presentation of specific instances of these types of view accumulate and effect each other. The Walt Disney Studio is credited with developing complete sequential visual plans of this type for animated films in the early nineteen thirties, as part of the streamlining of an essentially industrial

process, a practice that has become mainstream in both movie and comics.¹² Of course, the storyboard is itself a comic, but its status as a planning tool for a fully-factured production usually renders it inarticulate for any other purpose. This was the case with the storyboard for *Dispossession* (Fig. 5).

In *Dispossession*, the rules that I developed constrained the storyboarding of action by dictating: a limited range of distances between viewer and scene; views of discrete actions, not divisions of actions; rhythmic changes of scene and episode on the page; consistent rhythmic changes of point of view in a visible 1-2-3 rhythm; no extra-diegetic narrative; as small an amount of verbalisation in the plot as possible; generalisation: this treatment applied in all circumstances (Fig. 6).

This regime responded to the challenge of replacing Trollope's literary voice, his *John Caldigate* style of writing, and facilitated the further task of being able to theorise this replacement. More than his plots, Trollope's writing style, his techniques of understatement, create the overwhelming sense of the world in which he lived, his novels being set in the very recent past of the mid and late 19th century. Virginia Woolf said of Trollope's style that the reader believes in it '...as we believe in the reality of our own weekly bills.'¹³ However, although written at great speed, scrutiny of *John Caldigate* reveals that this effect is as much to do with the careful structuring of juxtapositions and omissions as with description. Trollope is both accurate and equivocal.

The first word of *John Caldigate* is 'Perhaps'. 'Perhaps it was more the fault of Daniel Caldigate the father than of... And yet,..', the narrator continues: '... of whom his neighbours said' and: 'It was rumoured of him, too, that...'¹⁴ Producing this sense of equivocation through the visual style of the graphic novel was key in showing, rather than telling, the plot: how does one draw 'perhaps'? I made a distinction between visual storyboarding and mark making. It was useful to maintain this distinction, because it allowed me to consider the partitioning of plot in terms of the structuring of reader points of view, relative to the panel, the page, the spread and the book. However, there are other ways in which the mark itself positions the reader relative to each scenario, to which I will return. The rules governing the visual storyboard were intended to replace Trollope's equivocation with a set of consistent visual effects. As a result of the rules, the reader never views the action from a distance closer than 15 or 20 feet. There

are single encompassing, locating panels, the equivalent of which would be 'establishing shots' in movie, but there are no close-ups and no middling views. The major characters in each panel are always seen full figure and the reader invariably keeps their own feet on the diegetic ground. Rather, the reader moves around the action from panel to panel, even as the characters move in diegetic space, in a regular, repetitive round between three points of view: a sort of reader waltz with the diegesis.

The visual world of *Dispossession* is not vague. It is vivid and distinct, but readers can only experience it from beyond the threshold of a small distance that they can never cross, that renders certain details unimportant. These details might, under other visual regimes, prove definitive. Keeping their feet on the ground, the reader is moved in a consistent rhythmic round of changes of point of view. Together, these effects both allow the visual world of *Dispossession* to appear materially robust and historically verisimilar and, at the same time, to deny the reader any single conclusive adjudication of views. This rationale prompted my approach to the partitioning of action in each visualisation of a scenario, event or action, in the sense that entire types of partitioning became unavailable to me, if the storyboard was to maintain its rhythm and distance. For example, the type of close scrutiny of the perfume bottle thrown by Laurie on page 195 of Moore and Gibbon's *Watchmen* was both impossible and undesirable within the regime of *Dispossession*.¹⁵ The short trajectory of the bottle takes place over three panels according to the time it takes to read the overlying text, that is, 'in slow motion'. The way in which the action is fragmented and delayed by voiceover, and the close proximity to the reader that it creates, renders it privileged and unequivocal, exactly the kind of effect that the rules of *Dispossession* were established to avoid.

Rather, the divisions of action in *Dispossession* were pushed by the regime into tableaux, with more historic theatrical roots. The distance and invariable mobility of the reader suggested gesture rather than facial expression as a meaningful expressive instance, for example. Similarly, I approached the actions comprising the plot as iconic rather than sensational. Hence, we can see on page two of *Dispossession* that distance and regularised mobility tend to produce a series of divisions of action along the lines: 'John climbs a tree', 'John fights his father', rather than 'John feels the bark beneath his hand', 'Sweat beads John's

brow'.¹⁶ In theatrical terms, this distinction between types of division of action, plus a focus on gesture, might be described as the distinction between different performance practices: 19th century melodrama, later theorised in the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold for example, and 20th century psychological realism, represented by the work of, say, Constantin Stanislavski.¹⁷ Although contemporary, everyday use of the word 'melodrama' has taken on the sense 'empty exaggeration', the practice of melodrama in the 19th century constituted a sophisticated system of gestures and groups of gestures recognised by contemporaneous audiences as communicating a comprehensive range of physical conditions and emotions. Of importance to my way of thinking about *Dispossession* was my use, in creating the visual storyboard, of individual still moments, ensemble tableaux, repeated gestures/body postures and iconic representations of action derived from the theatrical practice of melodrama. In contrast, the theatrical practice of psychological realism utilises trajectory, fragmentation, facial expression and motion to cue audiences to essentially invisible individual states of mind and emotional conditions. Both performance practices are codified regimes that utilise expressive resources and audience expectations in very different ways and, I suspect, the compelling strength of those expectations tends to universalise one regime at the expense of the other.

Of course, both 'melodrama' and 'psychological realism' are genres utilised in many registers, including theatre, movie and comic strip productions. However, in planning *Dispossession*, I made two associations: between the devices utilised in the 'melodrama' genre and the historic melodrama practices of the English theatre in the 19th century; and between the devices utilised in the genre of 'psychological realism' and the visual storyboarding of, say, Hollywood movies with sound (that is, after the mid nineteen twenties to the present). The first association allowed me to rationalise (and make use of) *Dispossession's* visual storyboard regime as both productive and emblematic of an experience of the 19th century. Perhaps, rather than confusing the practice devices of 19th century melodrama and the genre of 'melodrama', I should say that I was thinking of what actor and dramaturge François-Joseph Talma called 'l'optique du théâtre', or 'theatre view', which was at the time (in English translation in 1876) a term that combined the structure of a theatre space (a consistent distance between protagonists and audience), the methods of its actors (the devices of melodrama practice) and the expectations of its audiences (to experience both these things in any theatre production).¹⁸

The second association allowed me to label those devices utilised in the genre of 'psychological realism' as devices that pervade Occidental sound productions in the movie register and, to go further, both to associate them with the appearance of images made by the camera or lens itself (thus practically, if not accurately eliding the genre of 'psychological realism' with Hollywood talkies) and with the influence of these devices (and hence the camera) on mainstream Anglophone comics. In adopting the visual devices of 19th century 'l'optique du théâtre' and rejecting those I associated with this particular history of movie and of comic strips, I aimed to create both reader dis-habituation and to encode a physical sense of the 19th century in the visual storyboard of *Dispossession*.

Hence, I was aware that the storyboard rules in *Dispossession*, including this partitioning of action, would generate a book that 21st century readers might find unusual to read. However, the adoption of an older theatrical tradition of action grouping and partitioning in the storyboarding of *Dispossession* also acts to place the plot in the 19th century. It is a cue for 21st century readers. The visual style underwrites the relationships that *Dispossession* establishes with Trollope's text and with ideas of the 19th century that contemporary readers bring to the novel. I mention that I think that audience expectations tend to universalise one visual story-telling regime at the expense of others. Both formally and discursively, readers have expectations of the types of stories that particular styles of production habitually show. Habituation itself gives one form of comic strip status relative to another, even formalising a definition of the register itself. The adoption of 'Hollywood talkie' divisions of time into a graphic storyboard is only one type of possible formalisation. All images and sequences of images produce a temporal order of some sort. The association of 'divided motion' with Hollywood talkie conventions of storyboarding is only one type of many possible temporal orders. I am only referring to the storyboarding and editing conventions of this type of movie, but I assumed, in arranging *Dispossession*, that these conventions rely both upon the types of images produced by a lens as an ordering principle and upon the idea of visual illusion and the possibility of the occasional deployment of visual illusions.

Because each panel in *Dispossession* presents an icon of action rather than the sensation of action, the anaphora of the plot are categorically different

from the anaphora in a graphic novel structured by a movie-type regime. Anaphora constitute what the reader can know about the diegesis that is not shown in the plot. I use the word in its linguistic sense, but also to mean both every occurrence that has brought about the plot (it's antecedents) and every occurrence that must proceed causally from the plot (its postcedents), sometimes termed 'anaphora' and 'cataphora'.¹⁹ With a Hollywood talkie-type comics storyboard, knowledge of the trajectory of a body moving in space might form a crucial aspect of the anaphora, as a present-time sensation for the reader. The storyboard rules in *Dispossession* make this type of knowledge largely unimportant. I should point out, however, that I'm not talking about the plausibility of character movements under either a 'l'optique du théâtre' visual storyboard regime or Hollywood talkie visual storyboard regime. Under both sets of rules, characters conform to the physical constraints of the world: they can't be in two places at once and they can't walk through walls or change location without progressing from one place to another. Rather, I am talking about the impact on the reader of the different conventions by which that progress is represented.

Arguably, a change in the relative importance accorded to different categories of anaphora by viewers took place with the advent of movie and photography as new communications registers. If we compare two paintings from the period in which modern photography, then movie appeared, *La Place de l'Europe, temps de pluie* of 1877, a painting by Gustave Caillebotte with *The Children's Holiday* of 1864, a painting by William Holman Hunt, we can see the differences between these categories of 'unshown' knowledge, in which the images become meaningful. In Caillebotte's painting, it is the sense that we know that the image depicts a moment almost identical to the preceding and successive ones that is significant. In Holman Hunt's painting, the identification of the moment of depiction, relative to surrounding moments, is unimportant. Rather, it is knowledge of the histories of each element in the image, and the juxtaposition of these histories, that is significant. To 21st century viewers immersed in lens-based media, Holman Hunt's image highlights the loss of the habit of significantly relating the histories of elements to each other, whereas Caillebotte's extraction of a moment from a continuity of moments exploits the now-expected significance of a type of knowledge of before and after similar to

that which makes the 'snapshot', the phone movie or the 'selfie' comprehensible.

So what types of dramatic effect are produced by what I have called the 'l'optique du théâtre' storyboard regime developed for *Dispossession*? I have touched on the visual production of narrator equivocation relative to the writing style of Trollope through *Dispossession*'s storyboard regime, or the unambiguous presentation of ambiguity. I also thought of this as a part of my technique for representing the 19th century for 21st century readers. The 1870s are represented through the carefully researched use of verisimilar visual appearances, such as historically accurate styles of dress, locations and technologies. Further, a small number of visual cues as to character and the meaning of specific situations are overdrawn, to give 21st century readers a hint of the significance that they would have had in the past. Smith's straw hat alone is a cue to a world of social associations that underwrite her character. For a modern reader, it is an icon for significance, even if the reader doesn't necessarily understand the nature of this significance (Fig. 7).

However, the storyboard regime itself was by far the most important way in which I represented what I consider to be our fundamental unfamiliarity with the 19th century world: its near/far proximity to our own world.

As well as replacing Trollope's literary voice, the regime also replaced many of the rules of western comics storyboarding expected by contemporary comics readers. I intended the unfamiliarity or dis-habituating of the experience of reading *Dispossession*, compared with habitual expectations of reading a new graphic novel in English or French, to inculcate the strangeness of the diegetic world of the 1870s. In a sense, this unfamiliarity aims to place the reader in an affecting relationship with a vision of the period that is both coherent and comprehensively dis-habituating. *Dispossession* is meant to be dis-habituating to read, in the way that reading some comics of the mid- and late 19th century is dis-habituating. I'm thinking particularly of Marie Duval's Ally Sloper pages from the 1870s, the period in which the plot of *Dispossession* takes place. *Dispossession* purposefully shares some of its storyboard regime with these comics in order to create a specific sense of proximity to the past for the reader.

A corollary of Trollope's consistent use of round after round of accumulated equivocal commentary is the emergence of a specific reading rhythm in *John Caldigate*, to the point where we might claim that this rhythm is a key characteristic of his writing style. It derives entirely from the repetition of equivocal voices to present the plot. Although never mechanical, Trollope's continual round of 'perhaps', 'and yet' and 'it was said of', as it were, creates the pace of the storyboard, more than any event in the plot itself, dictating both a specific diegetic time and the pace of reading. The graphic novels that I had in mind when I was thinking about the layout of the pages and spreads are very different to each other in style and plot (Christophe Blain's *Socrates le demi-chien* album series and Joe Matt's *The Poor Bastard*), but share with *Dispossession* an invariable six panel grid, although Blain's is a Francophone album whose plot is set in ancient Greece and Matt's in an Anglophone graphic novel set in 1990s in west coast America.²⁰ In *Dispossession*, as in these books, the regularity produces a single pace of reading, modulated only by the time it takes to read different amounts of text or take in or scrutinise drawings for shorter or longer times. Comics layout impacts on the diegesis through speeding or slowing reading, an effect that can be utilised to create sensations of heightened drama or intimacy, or quickly push forward diegetic action. In *Dispossession*, the invariable grid aims to produce an evenness of reading speed as part of the visual replacement of Trollope's style of writing, which is also invariably paced.

The regular rhythm of the page layout influenced the way in which I thought about diegetic space beyond point of view. In particular, establishing this page rhythm alongside the lateral waltz of the storyboard regime achieved the task of creating the sense of a grounded world that is often achieved by the adoption of geometric perspective or the structure of a lens. Rather than the definitive diegetic 'floor' assured by these geometries, *Dispossession* substitutes 'beat', the assurance of equally paced, regular transitions. Congruent with 'l'optique du théâtre', I thought of this depicted 'floor' as a stage on which scenes regularly come and go and, on reflection, the floor of the stage is quite unlike the 'floor' of a drawing fixed by a geometric projection, that locates points precisely in a closed, systematic representation of space, of which the position of a single eye is absolute arbiter.

Alternatively, the floor of the stage is a generalised ground that continually shifts in relation to both viewers and actors. Sometimes, the audience shares the stage and, by extension, shares the diegetic space with characters. Sometime, the stage removes the action from the audience. A close visual analogy exists in the regimes for representing space in the Chinese painting tradition.²¹ In these regimes, either the top or right of a hand-held or hanging scroll forms a nominal 'most distant' area and the bottom or left forms a nominal 'least distant' area or, elements that are darkest are 'least distant' and elements that are lightest are 'most distant'. In proscenium theatre, stage scenery, flats and drops, stage left/stage right and front can all occupy 'most distant' or 'least distant' positions. Even 'up' and 'down' are mobile concepts, relative to both spectator and action.

In *Dispossession*, the diegetic 'floor' is certainly depicted as something on which the reader might stand, because the reader's eye level most often lies at a similar level to those of the characters. However, this 'floor' is geometrically incoherent, due to the accumulation of depicted elements that bring vestiges of their own, diverse spatial regimes with them into each panel. In particular, rather than utilising geometric projection to unify the view in each panel, I often made characters, props and locations spatially distinct, in order to refer the reader to the idea of 'the stage'. Paradoxically, this process was much aided by the use of collaged photographic elements in constructing each diegetic location and the action taking place within it. These elements finally succumbed to the specific motivation of the drawings, and were erased. But they contributed some of the local details and internal proximities that produce the historic verisimilitude in the drawings and left a residue of contrasting spacial regimes deriving from the process of collage itself. This is most obvious in panels where I have used the extreme changes of scale in close proximity, or a type of 'discordia concors' (union of opposites) associated with both Mannerism and, in theatrical terms, the early performance traditions of the *Commedia dell'Arte* (Fig. 9).²²

Turning to the facture of the drawings themselves, I suspect that there is a link between aspects of drawing technology in particular and the way in which I've tried to produce the sense of relative historic position and diegetic time in *Dispossession*, contributing to this sense of theatre. Perhaps fancifully, I imagine a drawing equivalent of Jean Louis Baudry's and Christian Metz's 'apparatus' theory (which is a theory of movie) in which the social, formal and technological

terms of depictive drawing are ideological in themselves. A fundamental aspect of apparatus theory is the indivisible inclusion of the impact of discourse on the meaningful adjudication of form. Hence, the situations in which movies are produced and consumed are themselves ideological (the manufacture of cameras, the building of cinemas and the business of performance being notable inclusions in such an adjudication of movies).²³ In my imagination, as performance, the traces that constitute depictive drawings are attenuated directly to the body and the physical resources of the body embed them. These I might call the apparatus of both the acts and the forms of drawings. In a sense, depictive drawing belongs to a category of intersubjective processes that directly transform the body and directly utilise it to transform the world. Such direct transformations arise out of crises of representation such as the perennial 'problem' of depiction, or how we come to recognise other visual situations in groups of marks that are entirely unlike them.

In direct co-present communication with others, the body reforms itself according to what are known as 'image schema', which stand for a physically felt but abstract sense.²⁴ These schema can represent our experience of others, of physical activities, of the apprehension of movement and time, of our use of objects and our understanding of space.²⁵ Although they arise afresh according to the needs of each situation, across both theatrical and depictive traditions, image schema form the basis for the lexica, although not necessarily the syntaxes, of a theatre actor's or artist's craft, unmediated by the lens. They also underpin the culturally habituated processes by which we recognise depictive drawings as the situations that they depict, as we struggle to achieve recognition of the depictive mark. In the case of the 'problem' of depiction, image schema spontaneously generate solutions that constitute successful depictions, through a process of catachresis. I'm conjecturing that the totality of this schematic catachresis in drawing is equivalent to movie's apparatus. Rhetorically, catachresis is the use of an existing word in a new way to describe something for which no other word exists. Catachresis uses words to break lexical rules so as to communicate something beyond the lexicon.²⁶ Visually, this is how a depictive drawing functions to successfully elicit recognition. Every drawing transforms the situation of both drawing and viewing by 'solving' the problem of depiction afresh in each new situation using the tools at hand to substitute others, as the body makes its marks.

When I was drawing *Dispossession*, I had in mind depictive lexica visible in the facture of the drawings of a small number of artists in whose work I recognised shared solutions to the problem of depiction and hence whose works generated, for me, related visions of the world. These included Cham, Honoré Daumier, John Piper and Edward Ardizzone. It was in part my sense of the shared meteorology of the worlds depicted that caused me to group them together, plus a sense that recognition of this particular weather system would contribute to produce the effect of the strangeness of the historic period upon the reader. On one level, I made associations between idea, period and depictive lexica that were not historical but, rather, derived from shared aspects of the lexica themselves, which I sought to emulate, and shared aspects of my responses to them.

For example, I made an association between my sense of the meteorology depicted by these artists and historic theorisations of the depictive role of colour. Throughout *Dispossession*, to depict light, I used a weft of coloured lines across blocks of another colour. These coloured lines have a variety of tones depending on the situation depicted. Sometimes, they enliven an area of dark shadow, sometimes an area of dazzling brightness. Their significance in the regime of facture lies in the fact that they are indistinguishable from the coloured lines with which I distinguish one form from another and one time of day, location, season or material from another. These lines establish figure/ground colour relationships in which every surface takes on depth. Consequently the depicted world scintillates, literally showing a thicker air than the colour ground alone could. There are outlines of forms, but these outlines hardly function as boundaries. They are continually overwritten, diminished and dissolved by the depicted meteorology by this method of drawing with colour. Because of this, in *Dispossession*, drawing does not dress form, it is form (Fig. 8).

In this context, theorising relationships between ‘colour’ and ‘form’ had relevant historic precedents for me, particularly in Italian Renaissance ‘paragone’ or ‘comparisons’ between the depictive styles of paintings.²⁷ The distinction proved useful to me, in reflecting upon the work of the small list of artists whose methods for depicting a particular meteorology I wished to emulate. On one hand, the word ‘colore’ described the depiction of the diegetic light by which means an image exists, with the word ‘colorito’ describing the technical methods for producing a depiction of this type.²⁸ On the other hand, the word ‘disegno’

described the identification of divisions and contours as a method for depicting encompassed volumes and the boundaries between one object and another.²⁹ It could be argued that *Dispossession* adopts a 'colore' depictive regime inspired by the image schema of the artists I have mentioned, in which light and air are themselves being depicted.

Cuing the reader to an idea of an unfamiliar 19th century past, this approach also acts to equalise the status of people, objects and locations, unifying them across the whole book. Everything in the diegesis is seen as having the same light and air, from the most significant gesture by a major character to the least significant book tucked away on an office shelf. According to this approach, the light encompasses changes of season, time of day and continent. Everything can be either illuminated to centre-stage brightness or made invisible by a cloaking gloom. No hierarchy exists in the palette used to achieve this pervasive light that would render a cloud less important than an eyebrow. This equality of treatment extends to every drawn line in *Dispossession*. It is often the matter of the slightest inflection or shift in context that makes a white line the tail of a speech balloon rather than a depiction of the light reflected on an old oak floor. Hence, according to 'colorito' as a method of production, it is in the light and air of *Dispossessions* drawings that we recognise both what is depicted and the ultimate subservience of every visual element of the plot to an encompassing visualisation of the past.

A further aspect of this approach to light was the treatment of character vocalisation and sound in the facture of *Dispossession*. Alongside the typographic appearance of text, the speech balloon, sound shape and caption box in comic strips appear on an axis between diegesis and page design, never being exclusively one thing or the other. In English comics of the 1870s, vocalisations are invariably captioned alongside the diegetic image, if they appear at all. Although it might be possible to argue that a diegetic space anchored by the image extends to these descriptive vocalisations, subsequent developments in the formal conventions of comics production (and of reading) designate captioning as para-narrative, unavailable to diegetic vocalisation or sound, which are today indicated by speech balloons and sound shapes that overlap the diegetic image.

In *Dispossession*, the narrative image is pre-eminent, highlighting the particular role accorded facture in the creation of a comprehensively depicted

atmosphere. In support of this, one of the rules constituting the storyboard regime requires as little verbalisation as possible, including vocalisation. This general approach dictated that speech and sound are always encompassed by the visual diegesis and indistinct from the style of drawing: they appear in the same light as visible actions. Due to these prescriptions, the speech balloons in *Dispossession* are not designated parts of the page design although, of course, they play a role. They never overlap the edges of the panel and always cluster in the air above their speakers' heads, obscuring parts of rooms, skies or trees, but never parts of the main characters. There are no other sounds in the book, other than the cry of a speared possum, appearing in either English (Wah!) or French (Ouin!), the languages of the reader, depending on the edition. Rather, the balloons have precedents in the speech balloons of older cartoons, such as those of Rowlandson and Gilray. They have exactly the same diegetic status as pieces of furniture and people, although they are materially distinct. Unlike balloons that articulate an arthrology for the page, foregrounding a space distinct from the action, the balloons in *Dispossession* are nested in the diegesis. Following the same approach to facture, the typeface used throughout *Dispossession* is also formed of the same line as the drawings. It is a digital typeface drawn specifically for the book, its cursive slant indicating handwriting, as the depictive marks made with the same line inscribe the hand directly in the image.³⁰ It is the similarity of the typeface to the depictive marks that is significant.

Colour also provides information about times and places that is often otherwise communicated in comic strips by means of the meta-narratives or voices-over absent from *Dispossession*. The seasonal round in Cambridgeshire, New South Wales and on board ship is largely indicated by changes in palette applied comprehensively throughout the graphic novel. The depiction of light creates time and location quite independently of the storyboard regime, in this sense, as depictions of autumn and spring in Cambridgeshire employ quite a different range of colours to each other, and a different range again to depict a tropical night and a tropical day on board the ship Danaë. A single set of modulations of palette cover a span of years in the plot. For example, the reader first encounters a Cambridgeshire summer on the first page of the book and, recognising the same 'summer' colours in an unfamiliar view much later on, on page 48, is cued to the fact that the plot is back in Cambridgeshire in the summer of a later year (Fig. 8). Page thirteen and page seventy-nine show the same location on the Cambridgeshire fens, years apart, one coloured for autumn

and one coloured for summer. The strict adoption of these colour modulations allows the reader to identify the same locations at different times of year, anchoring a whole temporal progress.

Because of this comprehensive application of different palettes to the same locations in different seasons and at different times of day, *Dispossession* presents a colour round that counterpoints the waltz of reader points of view in the storyboard. This round fundamentally affects the overall design of the book in a way that the page layout achieves, but the storyboard regime does not, breaking it into visible groups of pages defined by different palettes. Local colour is treated in a similar way, so that Mr and Mrs Bolton's house has a different decorative colour palette to Caldigate's home and the undergrowth in rural New South Wales is a different colour to the undergrowth in Cambridgeshire. Colour robustly communicates the temporal bones of *Dispossession*, before a reader can scrutinise the spread, page or panel, introducing and then making profound the physical character of the diegesis.

1. Grennan, S. (2015) *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape); Trollope, A. (1993) *John Caldigate* (Oxford: Oxford University); Grennan, S. (2015) *Courir deux lièvres* (Paris: Impressions Nouvelles).

2. Grennan, S. and Grove, L. Editors (2015) *Transforming Anthony Trollope: 'Dispossession', Victorianism and 19th century word and image* (Leuven: Leuven University).

3. Hutcheon, L. (2006) *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge), 122.

4. Here, I am using the term script to describe a text-only plan of the events of the plot. In planning those events to include in the plot, the script involved primary divisions of action, certainly, but these were determined by changes of location, time of day, year or character as much as by the actions of characters.

5. Trollope, A. (1993) *John Caldigate* (Oxford: Oxford University), 73.

6. *Ibid.*, 39.

7. Haines, R. (2003) *Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The Passage to Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales), 55.

8. Keen, I. (2004) *Aboriginal Economy & Society* (Melbourne: Oxford

University), 134.

9. Ibid., 178.

10. Grennan, S. (2015) *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape), 42.

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12. Disney Miller, D. (1956) *The Story of Walt Disney* (New York: Holt)

13. Woolf, V. (2012) *Granite and Rainbow* (New York: Girvin Press), 100.

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15. Moore, A. and Gibbons, D. (1987) *Watchmen* (New York: DC Comics), 195.

16. Grennan, S. (2015) *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape), 2.

17. Piches, J. (2003) *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (London: Routledge); Stanislavski, C. (1988). *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Methuen).

18. Gordon, R. (2006) *The Purposes of Playing: Modern Acting Theories in Perspective* (Ann Arbor: Michigan), 11.

19. 'Anaphora' and 'cataphora' are terms used in linguistics to denote textual devices for referring back and forwards, via the pronoun system, for example, or by co-reference. (Two examples of anaphora: (i) 'Vivien Maier was a self-taught street photographer. She never exhibited her work.' (ii) 'Interviews with Vivian Maier's former employers portray the photographer as reclusive and mysterious'. Two examples of cataphora: (i) 'She had a flair for framing and composition worthy of Cartier-Bresson, but Vivian Maier preferred to remain anonymous.' (ii) 'A new documentary sheds light on a little-known street photographer. Vivian Maier captured street scenes while working as a children's nanny'). The terms have been applied in narrative theory to designate the cohesive devices that regulate the reader/viewer's knowledge of what has already happened and predictions of what will happen: in a film these may, for example, take the form of visual cues such as the reappearance of a previously-seen car, or a cut to a location identifiable to the viewer from prior knowledge.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Simon Grennan, *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape 2015); front cover

Fig. 2. Simon Grennan, *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape 2015); 81

Fig. 3. Simon Grennan, *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape 2015); 27

Fig. 4. Simon Grennan, *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape 2015); 45

Fig. 5. Simon Grennan, *Storyboard for page twenty three of Dispossession* (2013)

Fig. 6. Simon Grennan, *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape 2015); 8

Fig. 7. Simon Grennan, *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape 2015); 21

Fig. 8. Simon Grennan, *Dispossession* (London: Jonathan Cape 2015); 48