The Non-World: Inaccessibility and Law in Charles Dickens’

*Bleak House*

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Abstract

The representation of Chancery court in Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1852-3) emphasises the inaccessibility of this institution to members of the laity. Dickens’ critique of Chancery chimes with Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological description of law as a formalistic social field defined by practices of exclusion. Dickens’ Chancery is however further inaccessible since it departs from Dickens’ laypeople’s horizons of expectation as a bureaucratic organisation defined by its structural dispersion and the generation of great quantities of writing. This thesis therefore scrutinises Dickens’ treatment of Chancery in light of *media-theoretical* and *geocritical*, as well as sociological, frameworks and perspectives.

This essay demonstrates that Dickens’ account of the institution of Chancery as conceptually inaccessible amounts to what I term a *non-world* heuristic. I contend that Dickens’ take on law anticipates what Fredric Jameson famously theorises as the dizzying “global world system” of late capitalism; the non-world heuristic of *Bleak House*—which combats disorientation in the social domain of law—may thus be understood as an early example of what Jameson terms an “aesthetic of cognitive mapping.” The non-world heuristic, this thesis proposes, likely has a role to play also in fictional attempts to cognitively map the global world system. I theorise the non-world heuristic in light of the discourse on accessibility in *possible-worlds theory* and the Kantian *sublime*, finding that the sublime non-world of Chancery is made accessible as *inaccessible* and that this dynamic is integral to Dickens’ aesthetic both as a maker of cognitive maps and as a realist novelist.

**Keywords:** Charles Dickens; *Bleak House*; non-world; Chancery; law; Pierre Bourdieu; Fredric Jameson; cognitive mapping; space; time; geocriticism; possible-worlds theory; the sublime.
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Kent: This is nothing, fool. / Fool: Then ’tis like the breath of an unfee’d lawyer—you gave me nothing for’t. Can you make us of nothing, nuncle? / Lear: Why, no, boy; nothing can be made out of nothing.

- William Shakespeare

There has been much ado about nothing since Shakespeare’s day, and going by Charles Dickens’ description in *Bleak House* (1853) there has been quite a ruckus in the judiciary. Not only does the unrecompensed lawyer do nothing in Dickens’ London, but, as J Hillis Miller suggests, the entire court of Chancery keeps itself busy performing “nothing”: Miller marks that, “Rather than being ways of doing things with words,” court documents offer themselves as, “examples of how not to do it [...] in an endless lateral round or relay, with one performative always generating another” (“Moments” 56). Indeed, Dickens’ typical Chancery suit hearing continues, undisturbed by all things remotely substantial, until it “die[s] out of its own vapidity, without coming, or being by anybody expected to come, to any result” (*Bleak House* 308). The nothing which the legal profession thereby performs—and in the same breath imposes on the laity—is truly something to Dickens: as this thesis shall contend, it represents the threat of things becoming nothing as it were—of *derealisation*. It seems all too natural that this issue should concern a prime exponent
of formal realism, and yet, as I hope to show in this essay, Dickens’ preoccupation with law’s nothing simultaneously complicates that label.

Pierre Bourdieu argues, in the seminal essay “Force of Law” (1987), that legal matters are decided by the different abilities of those involved to “marshal the available juridical resources” (827). In Bourdieu’s view, the legal field is fully available only to those who possess the socio-cultural disposition and formal recognition that comes with training as a lawyer. In this respect, Dickens’ lawyers are able to persist in their performance of nothing quite simply because they hold a near-monopoly on “juridical resources” and a total monopoly on speech acts in Chancery court (Chancery-suitors are confined to legal representation, no witnesses are heard). Crucially, Dickens’ treatment of Chancery chimes with Bourdieu’s notion that the institution of law implies the establishment of a borderline between actors. It divides those qualified to participate in the game and those who, though they may find themselves in the middle of it, are in fact excluded by their inability to accomplish the conversion of mental space (828).

In line with Bourdieu’s analysis, Dickens’ laypeople find themselves embroiled in a legal game which “so overthrows the brain” (7) that it is itself a nothing, a conceptual blank. In other words, Dickens’ critique of Chancery revolves around its “eliciting nothing” (241) in the eyes of Victorian laypeople, “nothing but confusion and failure” (244); there is “nothing to be got from it but sorrow” (466), “nothing but fees, fraud, horse-hair wigs, and black gowns” (468). “Nothing,” then, is Dickens’ impressionistic short-hand for how his laity perceives Chancery, or rather fails to perceive it. Indeed, Chancery’s devastating removal of disputed wills into a world of protracted legal proceedings so baffles Dickens’ Londoners that they ultimately acknowledge that “it won’t do to think of it!” (89). As I shall argue, Dickens’ narrative simultaneously describes the conceptual shortcomings of a Victorian laity and demystifies the legal field, thus seeking to provide access to law’s inaccessibility. That is, if Chancery makes nothing happen with words, Dickens’ repartee in turn makes something of law’s nothing, namely a heuristic model for his readership to navigate the legal sphere by. Saying nothing and doing nothing does not, in other words, always amount to being nothing; in Bleak House it should rather be understood as a mode of reckoning with social and political power. Bleak House is indeed a palimpsest of law’s discursive performance of nothing.
Chancery, then, appears to fall into a serious conceptual lacuna for Dickens’ Victorians. Here it is important to note that the laity of Dickens’ novel evidently lacks previous experience of 
*bureaucracy*. In other words, the nature of bureaucratic administration departs from Dickens’ laity’s horizon of expectation, thus exacerbating the unavailability of the legal sphere. The laypeople decry Chancery as a “monstrous system” (193) the monstrosity of which is precisely that it is a “system,” a structural organisation “so complicated, that no man alive knows what it means” (7). Typically, one sorry victim of “Chancery’s transcendent wickedness” (435)—Mr. Gridley—complains: “The system! I am told, on all hands, it’s the system. I mustn’t look to by individuals. It’s the system. […] My Lord knows nothing of it. He sits there to administer the system. […] He is not responsible. It’s the system” (193). This hapless, outraged suitor is clearly engaged in a cognitive struggle concerning what he perceives to be a ghastly abomination. Importantly, as Max Weber outlines, bureaucratic administration rose to become the pre-eminent form of governance in Europe over the 18th and 19th centuries; in Weber’s words, “The development of modern forms of organisation in all fields is nothing less than identical with the development and continual spread of bureaucratic administration” (223).¹ Dickens’ take on law in *Bleak House* in other words details the intrusion of bureaucratic administration into the lives of the populace (mainly the middle-class) during the Victorian era²; this also helps explain why the bourgeoisie of the novel (characters like Tom Jarndyce, Richard Carstone) are as scandalised and defenceless as persons of slighter socio-economic means (Mr. Gridley, Miss Flite). That is to say, *Bleak House* has to fundamentally articulate and conceptualise the phenomenon of bureaucracy as part of its contestation of this form of institutional power.³

I shall argue that Dickens’ story of suitors stranded in a conceptually inaccessible Chancery prefigures and indeed heralds the onset of the predicament

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¹The early expansion of British bureaucracy was, moreover, exceptional among European nations. Britain’s ratio of fiscal bureaucracy to population outnumbered the second—most heavily bureaucratized nation four times at the end of the 18th century (Weiss, Hobson, *States and Economic Development*).

²Not least Dickens himself, whose disenchantment with Chancery stemmed in part from personal grievances about a court case concerning plagiarism of his work where court ruled in his favour without this preventing Dickens from suffering considerable financial losses.

³Of course, *Bleak House* simultaneously represents a (slightly guarded) espousal of the recently formed London Police. The novel features one of the first detectives in English literature—Inspector Bucket—whose private eye-prowess lends him an astonishing degree of access to London and its inhabitants (even their inner lives). Indeed, the reach of Inspector Bucket’s long arm may be read as counterbalancing Chancery’s inaccessibility. However, as this essay is specifically concerned with elucidating the heuristic function of Dickens’ take on law, law enforcement falls outside my area of interest.
famously theorised by Frederic Jameson as the dizzying, unimaginable global world system. Dickens’ Chancery suitors are victimised by their conceptually inaccessible environment—the legal sphere—in a manner which foreshadows how increasing internationalisation, as Jameson argues in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), breeds disorientation and thus prevents political and individual agency. Here I align myself with Jameson’s championing of an *aesthetic of cognitive mapping*—“a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the subject with some new and heightened sense of its place in the global system” (*Postmodernism* 53)—arguing that Dickens’ non-world heuristic is a forerunner of this called-for aesthetic (which pertains to the legal field and not the “global system”).

I therefore simultaneously find myself in disagreement with Jameson’s notion that there is little historical precedence for the type of cultural production he advocates. In “Cognitive Mapping” (1988) Jameson begins his description of the aesthetic he envisions by stating, “I am addressing a subject about which I know nothing whatsoever, except for the fact that it does not exist” (347); indeed, Jameson has quite as much difficulty describing the called-for aesthetic, as the “unimaginable” global world that it is to contend with: “I am not even sure how to imagine the kind of art I want to propose here, let alone affirm its possibility” (347). Crucially, Jameson identifies socio-geographical disorientation as a modern predicament, in line with Kevin Lynch’s conception that the “problem of environmental imageability is a new one” (13); however, Dickens’ treatment of Chancery as a conceptually inaccessible environment suggests that this problematic dates at least as far back as Victorian England.

The term “Here be dragons” was used by early map-makers, as legend has it, to mark uncharted territory. *Bleak House* essentially gives us such a caution about perilous Chancery, a blank at the heart of Dickens’ laity’s cognitive map of London. Like Jameson’s global world system, Dickens’ conceptually inaccessible Chancery militates against individual agency. In delineating Chancery’s unavailability Dickens seeks to provide his readership with a cognitive map that may help them combat what Weber terms bureaucratic domination through knowledge.\(^4\) Crucially, the laypeople

\(^4\)Dickens places the reader in the Chancery-suitor’s shoes as it were, lost in Chancery. The introduction of the Norton Critical Edition of *Bleak House* marks that, “the novelist’s special knowledge is certainly one of the assets of his storytelling, but it is a quality that can also cut in opposite directions [...] to follow out the legal allusions in the opening chapter, it is necessary only to allow the novelist his assumptions that his readers have some rudimentary knowledge of how a mid-nineteenth-century court
of *Bleak House* get nowhere in their dealings with Chancery—except when there is some basic recognition of the legal sphere’s inaccessibility. Thus Dickens’ archetypal indictment of Chancery reads:

> The one great business of the English law is, to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble. (482)

This passage exemplifies not only Dickens’ rapier wit but also the instructive quality of his commentary on law; that is, Dickens emphasises the disorienting effect of Chancery’s intangibility, pronouncing law a “monstrous maze” for the uninitiated. Reading between the lines a declaration of intent is apparent: Dickens’ novel will provide a map of Chancery which details its self-serving nature for Dickens’ readership to navigate institutional power by (so that they will “cease to grumble” and instead take forcible action). Crucially, as Dickens’ third-person narrator suggests, “fighting with shadows and being defeated by them, necessitates the setting up of substances to combat” (489).

There is, then, a pronounced didactic quality to Dickens’ representation of law. Raymond Williams, who deems this to be the hallmark of Dickens’ later writing, lauds Dickens’ ability to find “fictional forms for seeing what is not seeable” (171). That is, Williams emphasises Dickens’ penchant for depicting a world “increasingly dominated by processes that could only be grasped statistically or analytically—a community unknowable in terms of manifest experience” (247). Similarly, Terry Eagleton declares social structures “the true protagonists” of Dickens’ later work (130). For Eagleton, the social analysis informing Dickens’ writing is *systemic* in the sense that it conceptualises and describes various social developments as “the function of decentralised structures like Chancery [...] which seem all-pervasive yet everywhere absent” (129-30). Agreeing with Williams’ and Eagleton’s suggestions that *Bleak House* seeks to help its readers grasp a system that is “everywhere absent” and not “seeable”, my essay highlights how the pervasive discourse on law’s opacity in Dickens’ novel has a pedagogical value in itself.

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functioned” (xvi). To my mind, Dickens’ immediate readership likely suffered in the same respect; the fact that Dickens’ mires the reader in illegible discourse may, then, be understood as a purposely disorienting device properly immersing the reader in law’s inaccessibility.
The peculiarity of Dickens’ representation of law may be gauged by considering the comparison often made to Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925), which is indeed the paradigmatic example of a novel which portrays law’s inaccessibility. John Lucas is not alone among critics in understanding that, “What Kafka was credited with introducing in *The Trial*—namely a new awareness of our lives as governed by Law—Dickens had found a fictional means of addressing some seventy years earlier” (86). Dickens’ Chancery suitors evidently foretaste what will come to be known as the Kafkaesque—and yet, the scandalised tone of *Bleak House* (exemplified in Mr. Gridley’s diatribe against “the system”) is quite at odds with law’s settled omnipresence in Kafka’s novel. That is, Dickens’ suitors find themselves up against a faceless bureaucracy that they are ill-equipped to comprehend let alone combat, whereas Joseph K’s difficulties are not conceptual *per se*. Placing Dickens’ novel alongside Kafka’s, in other words, lays bare the historical specificity of Dickens’ take on institutional power. In *Bleak House* the comparative novelty of bureaucratic administration’s expansion brings an emphasis on the incomprehensibility of the legal sphere. The label “Kafkaesque” is useful in that it suggests the kinship of *Bleak House* and *The Trial*, but the anachronism involved here itself bespeaks that there was not the same conceptual readiness to appreciate the workings of institutional power in Victorian England.

Dickens’ treatment of law, in other words, emphasises the laity’s inability to grasp Chancery, owing, with D. A. Miller, to the “newness of the phenomenon that Dickens is describing under that name (63). Miller’s new historicist essay “Discipline in different voices” represents an important intervention in criticism on *Bleak House*; for Miller, *Bleak House* bespeaks the rise of what Michel Foucault theorises as disciplinary society. Crucially, Miller takes the “unlocalisability” (60) of Dickens’ legal sphere as confirmation of Foucault’s thesis about the increasingly Panoptic nature of social control; in doing so however, Miller overlooks the importance of having access to the legal field in Dickens’ London—in short, Miller does not deign to consider law’s unlocalisablility in terms of *who* it is that fails to determine its whereabouts. I shall contend that the difficulty of locating Chancery arises primarily from Dickens’ laity’s lack of a cognitive map of bureaucratic law. Miller’s essay constitutes a milestone in criticism on *Bleak House*—however, as indicated, there are

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deficiencies in Miller’s Foucauldian analysis that I believe may be redressed by stressing the dynamic of inaccessibility at work in Dickens’ critique of Chancery. I am thus responding to Miller’s reading in several sections of this paper. Herein Bourdieu’s sociological analysis complements Miller’s Foucauldian perspective, effectively functioning as a corrective to certain omissions and mismatches of this outlook.

In accounting for law’s inaccessibility Dickens may be seen to employ the same strategy as his Chancery suitors, who flesh out their institutional adversary “in place of its being an abstraction” (486). As I propose, Dickens’ Chancery, on account of its comprehensive opacity to the laity, may be theorised as what I term a non-world. This heuristic model essentially seeks to provide insight into socio-geographical landscapes or domains by outlining their opacity. My description of this heuristic at work in Bleak House is thus intended not only as a contribution to scholarship on Dickens’ work, but also as an analysis delineating an aesthetic of cognitive mapping potentially iterated also in literature which describes, for instance, the conceptual inaccessibility of the global world system.

The non-world character of Dickens’ Chancery is the sum total of many nothings; indeed, I use the term “heuristic” in order to suggest the non-world model’s looseness as well as its pronounced practical applicability. The bottom line is, in the words of Lynch, that a map, “exact or not, must be good enough to get one home” (9). Noting the particularity of Dickens’ representation of law as a non-world, the disposition of my paper is tripartite, examining socio-economic, discursive and spatiotemporal aspects of Chancery’s unavailability to Dickens’ laity. Moreover, in order to account for Dickens’ multilayered non-world heuristic, my reading of Bleak House draws on a variety of theoretical frameworks, some of which are unrelated, if not at odds with each other, thus seldom figuring side by side in research. I have, however, deliberately opted for this variegated approach as it enables me to explore several different aspects of Dickens’ portrayal of Chancery that combine to form what I term a non-world heuristic

My first part outlines the inaccessibility ingrained in the judiciary’s modus operandi. We shall consider Bourdieu’s suggestion that law is perfectly accessible to legal practitioners endowed with the socially ingrained cultural capital that permits them to navigate and indeed preside over the legal field, an embodied knowledge which Bourdieu terms the legal disposition or habitus; in Bourdieu’s words, “The
alteration of mental space, logically and practically contingent upon change in social space, guarantees the mastery of the situation to those who possess legal qualifications” (834). The laity, incapable of making the corresponding correction of “mental space,” is for Bourdieu conversely “nothing more than a group of individuals who have fallen under the jurisdiction of the courts” (837). In order to have some agency in the legal field one needs to be in on and accept the rules of the game; among other things, one has to appreciate that “a superior power appears before the litigants, one which transcends the confrontation of private world-views and which is nothing other than the structure” (831). Dickens’ tragic suitor Mr Gridley, who complains about the depersonalised “system” of Chancery, clearly lacks this disposition, which is his tragic flaw. Moreover, the fact that the judiciary gives itself out to be “nothing other than the structure” indicates, as Bourdieu suggests, that there is an obscurantist element to law’s unlocalisability. Indeed, we shall trace how Dickens’ Chancery lawyers are actively engaged in mystifying their clients.

As I demonstrate in the second section of part one, the narrative of Bleak House portrays Chancery as existing on a separate ontological stratum, severed from the (textual) world of London. In light of Thomas Pavel’s notion of ontological layering, the predicament of Dickens’ Chancery-suitors may essentially be understood as a case of “ontological stress” caused “by difficulties of orientation among the complexities of modern ontological arrangements”, which leads to a “weakening of adjustment to ontological landscapes” (157). In striking a wedge between law and London at large, Dickens’ narrative establishes a dichotomy wherein Chancery stands as a non-world to the “real” world of London. That is, crucially, what Bourdieu terms the judiciary’s symbolic power figures in Bleak House as a form of modern-day magic, casting a spell of derealisation that draws concerns, people and estates into the judicial non-world.

In the third section of part one I discuss Dickens’ method as a conceptual cartographer of Chancery court, sketching out the theoretical underpinnings of my notion of the non-world heuristic. We shall consider Dickens’ dichotomy of non-world law and real-world London in terms of Marie-Laure Ryan’s approach to studying inter-world accessibility relations, while simultaneously tracing the non-world’s sublime heritage citing Immanuel Kant’s philosophical-aesthetical framework. Here I establish that Kant’s concept of negative presentation is useful for
describing how Dickens renders the “unseeable” by making law accessible as inaccessible.

Having in the first part of this essay theorised my notion of the non-world and outlined its presence in *Bleak House*, my subsequent two parts will mainly deal with the specificity of Dickens’ representation of his laity’s clash with bureaucracy. Chancery-bureaucracy is defined in *Bleak House* by its structural dispersion in space and its generation of a great deal of writing (seemingly endless “non-performatives”). In part two we shall consider the illegibility of legal discourse, incongruous to Dickens’ laypeople both as a distinct social language defined by cumbersome technical jargon (“legal chaff” [*BH* 233]) and through the unprecedented sheer volume of writing involved in bureaucratic administration, itself a mystery to Dickens’ Victorians. Indeed, Chancery is seemingly made up of nothing but documents, which is, then, part of what makes it a non-world. Here Dickens’ discourse on discourse partakes of the platonic stance against writing as a falsifying copy (twice) removed from reality—*Bleak House* is in fact a novel curiously troubled by the spread of reading and writing. Indeed, for the illiterate Jo—who is one-step closer to “the real” as it were—the London of signs essentially shares Chancery’s non-world character. Incapable of inhabiting or making sense of a London permeated by signs, the illiterate’s difficulties mirrors the Chancery-suitors’. Thus, Jo’s status as an outsider in a London dominated by writing extends the non-world problematic to the illiterate’s London. We shall consider Dickens’ suspicion toward writing in two *media theory*-inflected sections, which deal respectively with the illiterate Jo’s reality and with the novel’s importance for the spread of literacy in relation to the form of *Bleak House*.

The final part concerns the role of space and time in Dickens’ non-world heuristic. Employing Mikhail Bahktin’s concept of the *chronotope*—a narrative spatiotemporal unit—I consider how Dickens’ suitors fare navigating the spacetime of bureaucracy; this in order to show that Chancery’s dispersed structural organisation plays a large part in its opacity to Dickens’ laypeople. As stated, D. A. Miller understands that the judiciary’s unlocalisability implies the redundancy of its specific architectural spaces—as I show however, Chancery’s very lack of a clearly demarcated place ensures that it instead represents a separate form of *spatiality* in Dickens’ London. I demonstrate that Dickens’ Chancery-suitors fail to grasp the system of Chancery partly because their conceptual horizons have been shaped by the
still dominant spatiality of “place.” Dickens’ laity conceives of space only in terms of place and thus appreciates Chancery’s dispersed spatiality simply as a lack of place, or a non-place.⁶

In the second section of part three I relate Dickens’ treatment of space and time to Jameson’s and David Harvey’s scholarly approach to the study of modern literature, which situates literary trends in relation to the social production of space and time as a function of developments in capitalism. I propose that the non-world chronotope of Bleak House describes the onset of a shift toward a socio-geographic landscape less rooted in the local, immediate and tangible, a shift visible in the discrepancy between the laity’s mindset and the fact of Chancery bureaucracy. Attention to historical changes in the social production of spacetime is, in other words, paramount to my reading of Bleak House. I seek to problematise Jameson’s notion⁷, shared by Harvey, that “realist” writing of the Victorian era did “not involve problems of figuration as acute as those we will confront in the later stages of capitalism” (410). As Elena Gomel rightly suggests, “the spatial poetics of Victorian literature is far more diverse than our conventional critical focus on ‘place’ allows us to see” (2). Gomel’s reading of Bleak House begins to address this deficit; however, Gomel does so by “link[ing] scientific revolutions in the conceptualisation of spacetime with new forms of artistic and literary representation” (6), rather than with an eye for the social production of space and time, and thus ultimately falls short of registering the full force of this novel’s confrontation with the Enlightenment episteme. Gomel perceives a “layering of two distinct spaces in Bleak House” (54), a dichotomy of “realistic London” (42) and the “fantastic extradiegetic level where the Newtonian certainties of time and space are supplanted by their phantasmagoric distortions” (43); however, as suggested, bureaucratic spacetime actually undermines “Newtonian certainties of time and space” on a purely diegetic plane as well. Crucially, Gomel cites the dinosaur which traverses London in the opening paragraph as evidence of the novel’s “fantastical” extradiegetic level, without recognising that

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⁶The term non-place has been used to denote various things. As stated, I employ the term to indicate how Dickens’ Victorian laity geared toward place necessarily apperceives dispersed Chancery. Notably, Marc Augé uses the term to describe the emptiness of supermarkets, airports, hotel-rooms, etc, anthropological places that lack history and individual character (Non-places 1992). Bruno Bosteels points out that the concept figures prominently in much French post-structuralist critique, especially that of Foucault and Derrida (“Nonplaces” 2003).

⁷I am here referring to Jameson’s take on realism in Postmodernism—elsewhere his theorisation of realism is rich and highly illuminating, particularly in the essay “The Realist Floor-Plan” and the recent book Antinomies of Realism.
the “Monster” (441) of bureaucratic institutional power plagues London throughout the novel.  

As stated, Jameson holds that an aesthetic of cognitive mapping may help provide a basis for individual and political agency in the global world system. This contention arguably holds considerable weight given the rise of postcolonial writing and so-called world literature, a panoply of literary works that attempt to (re-)draw global and local cognitive maps. Jameson speaks of “the spatial turn” in the era of increasing internationalisation (Postmodernism 154), a shift also heralded by Foucault in “Of Other Spaces” (1967, 1986). A flourishing of social, cultural, critical spatial studies and theory has indeed taken place over the past decades; Marxist geography arrived in the early 1970s with David Harvey at the fore, and important theoreticians like Henri Lefebvre, J. B. Harley, Derek Gregory and Edward Soja are all proponents of an intersectional scholarship that, in the words of David Ley and James Duncan, concerns the “cultural dimensions of landscape, place or space” (332).

The recent continuation of this spatial turn in literary scholarship has brought the advent of geocriticism, which, in the foundational words of Bertrand Westphal, debates the following question: “[w]hat happens to space-time in an anomic context in which fiction, among other forms, becomes key to a reasonable reading of the world?” (4). Jameson’s envisioned aesthetic of cognitive mapping clearly falls within the auspices of this scholarly phalange. My notion that a non-world heuristic is at work in Bleak House may thus also be understood as a theoretical contribution to this expanding field of research. One leading geocritic—Robert T. Tally—holds that the “world system as a whole cannot be comprehended using the older representational methods” (12); I seek to challenge this notion (apparently something of an axiom) by showing Dickens’ pedagogical fiction to be engaged in a kindred cognitive struggle employing “representational methods” that might be of great use also for grasping the ever-changing social geography of the global world system. In short, a practical art adequate to describing postmodernity must not necessarily be born of postmodernity.

The final section of part three describes how Dickens’ concerns about the delocalised structure of Chancery are echoed in the novel’s discourse on foreign aid.

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8 Indeed, as Richard Gravil notes, “The ‘megalosaurus’ seems equally applicable to Chancery” (49).
9 Instructive in this sense is the geocritic Peta Mitchell’s description of The Cartographic Strategies of Postmodernity (2008) as inspired by earlier forms of subversive literary map-making in the work of Charles Baudelaire and the Surrealists, as well as in Walter Benjamin’s criticism and the psychogeography of the Situationists.
or “Telescopic Philanthropy.” Importantly, both Chancery and so-called Telescopic Philanthropy engender domestic trouble. Dickens’ conservative take on international community, or cosmopolitanism, as a derealisation of the domestic parallels the novel’s cognitive mapping of Chancery court. Having situated Dickens’ non-world heuristic historically, as bound up with developments in international capitalism, I ultimately contend that the novel in fact produces this situatedness itself, in and by its account of internationalisation.

Ultimately, the epistemological underpinnings of realism begin to come loose with Dickens’ non-world heuristic that permits perception of the “unseeable.” In The Rise of the Novel Ian Watt affirms that modern realism “begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses” (12); Dickens’ Bleak House arguably postulates this empiricist epistemology, but begins to undermine it in taking intangible Chancery bureaucracy as its leitmotif. Watt holds that early “realist” description (that of Defoe for instance) was content to give the “primary qualities” of objects—“their solidity, extension, figure, motion and number”, a descriptive style of a “positive and wholly referential quality very well suited to carrying out the purpose of language as Locke defined it, ‘to convey the knowledge of things’” (102). In short, Watt describes literary realism as a paradigm shift with which the writer’s main aim becomes to “make the words bring his object home to [the reader] in all its concrete particularity” (29). However, Bleak House testifies that not all phenomena permit of easy incorporation into the empiricist paradigm and thus into the project of literary realism as described by Watt. Dickens’ object of description is the impalpable legal system, the truth of which cannot be discovered through the senses: Bleak House is thus devoted to bringing a “non-object” home to the reader in all its (in-)concreteness. Dickens’ treatment of Chancery shows the “referential” or empiricist descriptive style which Watt describes to be equally suited to conveying a lack of knowledge of things.

Law’s naming

For Bourdieu, “[l]aw is the quintessential form of the symbolic power of naming that creates the thing named” (“Force” 838). In short, law represents a redoubtable creative force—indeed, Bourdieu speaks of the “judiciary imagination” (846)—because it is culturally authorised to “transform the world by transforming the words for naming it, by producing new categories of perception and judgment” (839).
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judiciary is however, Bourdieu suggests, actively engaged in dissimulating the agency involved in its exertion of symbolic power: the lawyer, as Bourdieu states, prefers the “role of the lector, or interpreter, who takes refuge behind the appearance of a simple application of the law” (823). Crucially, for Bourdieu,

[t]he self-representation which describes the court as a separate and bounded space within which conflicts are transformed into specialist dialogues and the trial as an ordered progression toward the truth, accurately evokes one of the dimensions of the symbolic effect of juridical activity as the free and rational application of a universally and scientifically recognized norm (830).

In accordance with this description of law, Dickens’ legal professionals disguise that they hold a vested interest in law suits by a veneer of impartiality and disinterested professionalism. Crucially, on account of Chancery’s fee-based wage system, the institution and upkeep of suits was particularly lucrative for barristers, bailiffs, law-writers, judges, etc, providing fertile ground for corruption.10 Thus, in Bleak House Chancery court juggles non-performatives until entire estates are “found to have been absorbed in costs” (760).

Dickens’ Chancery, then, has the character of a great swindle that is made possible by the laity’s confusion. In short, Chancery’s performance of nothing constitutes a disappearance act of sorts. Indeed, the suggestion of illusionism that inheres in Dickens’ take on Chancery as a non-world is brilliantly underscored when the central suit of the novel—“Jarndyce and Jarndyce”—at long last comes to an end, not because the court has reached a verdict, but because court costs have devoured the assets at stake: nothing whatsoever comes of the suit, it simply “lapses and melts away” (760). The irony and brutal aptness of this anticlimactic ending is not lost on Dickens’ Londoners; those leaving court that day are “more like people coming out from a Farce or a Juggler than from a Court of Justice” (758). Meanwhile, the butt of the joke—the suitor Richard Carstone, who has hoped that the court verdict would affirm his claim—does not laugh, instead he starts to bleed from his mouth (indeed, this blow proves to be his death-knell).

Bleak House is in other words, contrary to D. A. Miller’s belief, far from a “satire on the inefficiency of the court” (63); instead the novel exposes Chancery’s brutally efficient appropriation of capital. Miller apparently takes Sir Leicester’s

10In the preface of Bleak House Dickens mentions, as testimony to the “truth” of his narrative, a suit which was “commenced nearly twenty years ago” which, for Dickens, “is no nearer to its termination now than when it was begun”; and another which began “before the close of the last century” (3).
understanding of Chancery as a “slow, expensive, British, constitutional sort of thing” (*BH* 15) as representative of Dickens’ analysis. And yet, the tragic end of Richard’s encounter with law is not, as Miller would have it, simply the consequence of Foucauldian productive power which depends “on being voluntarily assumed by its subjects, who, seduced by it, addicted to it, internalise the requirements for maintaining its hold” (61): Richard’s fall is, as seen, in fact *engineered* by the lawyer Mr. Vholes, who profits greatly by it. Typically, Vholes originally makes a mutual acquaintance (Mr. Skimpole) “a present of five pounds” (522) so as to be introduced to Richard and win him as a client; in short, he is clearly confident of a return. The lawyer then proceeds to convince Richard to stake his claim in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and goads him on until he has “swallowed up the last morsel of his client” (760). In other words, Miller is mistaken in contending that *Bleak House* critiques Chancery’s “utterly inefficient procedures” (68)—conversely, Chancery’s ostensible “inefficiency” represents an expert embezzlement.

At the end of the court day, there is little doubt that Dickens’ lawyers comprehend legal complication very well; that is, they are generally intent on obscuring the laity’s perception of proceedings, aware that it facilitates their work. Typically, while Dickens’ suitors marvel at Chancery’s production of nothing, the Chancery-lawyers of the novel are conversely busy testifying that there really is something to pursue in Chancery: “The suit does not sleep; we wake it up, we air it, we walk it about. That’s something. It’s not all Jarndyce, in fact as well as in name. That’s something. Nobody has it all his own way now, sir. And that’s something, surely” (486). Citing these infinitesimal victories, the lawyer Mr. Vholes dupes his client Richard into believing that his expenditure on “Jarndyce and Jarndyce” will prove profitable. That is, the “Vampire” (720) Vholes professes to have set up his business “with a view to everything being openly carried on” (720), and this is itself part of his exceedingly underhanded and manipulative dealings with his client. Ultimately, Vholes’ very pretence to transparency epitomises how Chancery court operates largely on the basis of its opacity and inaccessibility to the laity.

The nothingness of the law, then, is a “conjuror’s trick” (13) on the part of Chancery-lawyers that is all the more effective in and by a failure of apperception on the part of Dickens’ laity. Miss Flite, who has lost her wits (as well as her entire family) to the non-world of Chancery, testifies, “Chancery justice is so ve-ry difficult to follow” (47). Chancery’s inscrutability is encapsulated in “Jarndyce and
Jarndyce”—an “impalpable suit which no man alive can understand” (489). This suit concerns not only Richard, but also John Jarndyce, Ada Clare and Esther Summerson who is the heroine of the novel and one of its two narrators (the other being Dickens’ third-person narrator). In relating her first experience of court Esther professes, “I felt very ignorant, but what could I do? I was so entirely unacquainted with the subject, that I understood nothing about it even then” (22). This typifies both Esther’s bashfulness and Chancery’s enigma. Notably, Esther’s sentiment that she could make little of Chancery “even then” suggests that she has come to understand still less (than “nothing”) since; indeed, when she has the opportunity of studying court proceedings again, with an improved grasp of the matter at stake, the scene has become:

so curious and self-contradictory […] that it was at first incredible and I could not comprehend it […] there seemed to be no reality in the whole scene […] everybody concerned was in a state of idle entertainment, and nothing could be made of it by anybody (308).

Here Esther finds court procedure so confusing that she cannot be sure that there is any reality to it whatsoever. Significantly, Esther’s sentiment that “nothing could be made of court proceedings by anybody” fails to index the fact of the opposed positions occupied by the canny, “idle” legal professionals and the browbeaten laypeople, a misrecognition that essentially bears out her profession that the workings of the legal field are a mystery to her.

Typically, the naïve trooper George is bandied about by lawyers until he is advised by Mrs. Bagnet to be “careful of interference with matters he does not understand”, instructed that he is “never to put his foot where he cannot see the ground” (345). Mrs. Bagnet’s maxim aptly bespeaks the laity’s difficulty plotting a course in the conceptual darkness of Chancery, which indeed constitutes a, typically modern, form of *terra incognita*. If Esther and Miss Flite struggle to make sense of the legal field, the worldly-wise Mrs. Bagnet is conversely perfectly cognizant of law’s workings. She serves as her friend George’s touchstone in all matters concerning a, to his mind, overly complicated civil society. When George is placed under arrest and promptly refuses legal representation in order to accomplish his acquittal, trusting that his innocence will see him free, Mrs Bagnet offers the adage, “[i]t won’t to have truth and justice on his side; he must have law and lawyers” (656). In Dickensian aphoristic fashion this suggests a fundamental divorce of truth and law, justice and law; George must enlist the specific competence of the lawyer equipped to wheedle him out of jail. Law’s perversion of the truth is manifest also when Jo is to be
examined by a domestic mock-court and the lawyer-trainee Mr. Guppy “takes him in his hand as a witness, patting him into this shape, that shape, and the other shape, like a butter-man dealing with so much butter” (241). Indeed, *Bleak House* describes law as genuinely duplicitous—ostensibly administering justice but in fact “giv[ing] to monied might, the means abundantly of wearying out the right” (7). Thus, Jo’s lack of cultural capital (his illiteracy) disqualifies him as a witness even as he amply demonstrates his honesty in and by the artlessness of his answers:

Don’t know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think. Don’t know that Jo is short for a longer name. […]. Won’t do, gentlemen! [We can’t] receive his evidence […] We can’t take that, in a Court of Justice, gentlemen. It’s terrible depravity. Put the boy aside” (134).

Law’s show of impartiality and independence, in short, masks the fact that court constitutes a social arena where various forms of capital sway outcomes.

Dickens’ laypeople are essentially subject to what Bourdieu calls the *power of form*, the “symbolic violence perpetrated by those who, thanks to their knowledge of the formalization and proper juridical manners, are able to put the law on their side” (849-50). Dickens’ portrayal of Chancery makes abundantly clear that the cornerstone of legal procedure, as Bourdieu affirms, is the “practical exclusion of laypeople” (837). Bourdieu’s sociological analysis builds on the foundational work of Max Weber, for whom bureaucracy is equally an iron cage patrolled by “technical specialists” (224). As Weber puts it, “[b]ureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge […] the concept of ‘official secrets’ is certainly typical of [bureaucracy]” (225). This is evident also in Dickens’ analysis of bureaucracy; Dickens’ Chancery lawyers are forever “mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities” (6), “legal repetitions and prolixities” (16) that are quite incomprehensible to the laity.

The first few pages of *Bleak House* describe a London enveloped in fog, which, moreover, carries into the description of Chancery in the initial court-scene, thus setting tone for Dickens’ critique, which gives Chancery as fog-like, or *impalpable*. Fog is indeed a controlling metaphor of Dickens’ treatment of the law (as is mud), a trope that is highly suggestive of Chancery’s inscrutability and of a laity mired in confusion. For Dickens’ laypeople, entering the judiciary equates to entering the unknown. As Dickens’ third-person narrator states, “well may the uninitiated from
the streets, who peep in through the glass panes in the door, be deterred from entrance by its owlish appearance” (6). Miss Flite attests the taxing nature of following the procedures of a conceptually inaccessible domain: “I find the nights lag, for I sleep but little, and think much. That is of course unavoidable; being in Chancery” (53). Having “thought much”, Flite perceives that she has cracked the code, when she has in fact lost her mind (though her garbled concept of Chancery certainly rooms some very accurate, albeit skewed, observations). Similar misrecognition is evident in Richard’s topsy-turvy notion that John Jarndyce, as opposed to himself, “is only an outsider, and is not in the mysteries. We have gone into them, and he has not. He can’t be expected to know much of such a labyrinth” (612). Richard is clearly mistaken in believing that, he as opposed to Jarndyce, is in on the mysteries of the legal field—in actual fact he is more mystified than ever Jarndyce, who has been prescient enough not to enter the “labyrinth” of Chancery.

Perceiving Chancery’s inaccessibility John Jarndyce fares better than Richard in his dealings with the law. Indeed, their different outlook apropos the mysteries of Chancery largely determines their degree of vulnerability. Access to inaccessibility in other words makes all the difference in Dickens’ non-world heuristic.

**Ontological stress**

On our way to visit court for the first time in *Bleak House* we pass through a needle’s eye of a gateway in Temple Bar, an outer-barrier archway of the old walled city of London and the ceremonial entrance to Westminster:

> The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation: Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln’s Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery. (5-6)

This “old obstruction” (which created traffic jams, hence its removal in 1878) is indeed an “appropriate ornament” for Chancery’s threshold, delineating Chancery as a separate domain that presents the laity with serious impediments blocking their way of to entry. Crucially, the fact that we come to court via a semi-permeable membrane demarcating Chancery as a separate sphere, serves to erect a boundary at once
physical and symbolical between Westminster and London at large. In this section we shall examine how Dickens’ non-world heuristic divorces law from real-world London.

Early on in the novel Esther remarks to Richard and Ada, “We are never to get out of Chancery. We have come by another way to our place of meeting yesterday” (47). This is said only in jest, but proves quite the premonition—Esther’s words cruelly foreshadow the fact that she is desperately seeking to extricate her newfound friends from Chancery’s hold at the point of her next visit to court. By then John Jarndyce has kindly explained that, “we can’t get out of the suit on any terms, for we are made parties to it, and must be parties to it, whether we like it or not” (89), a sentiment which echoes Mr. Gridley’s complaint: “I was obliged to go into this accursed Chancery; I was forced there, because the law forced me, and would let me go nowhere else” (192). Importantly, it is Chancery’s symbolic power—its ability to categorise and thus dictate reality—that gives it such a resolute hold on the laity. Here we might thus take on board Bourdieu’s notion that,

entry completely redefines ordinary experience and the whole situation at stake in any litigation [...] a complete retranslation of all of the aspects of the controversy is necessary [...] to institute the controversy as a lawsuit [...] such a retranslation retains everything that can be argued from the point of view of legal pertinence, and only that” (831-2).

The ordinary, everyday status of all things “annexed into the juridical realm” (836) is in other words irrelevant once they have been defined as legal matters.

Dickens’ suitors must, in Bourdieu’s words, abide by the “reality which arises from [law’s] classificatory operations” (839), the transformation of a pre-juridical matter into a legal case which “may entail the distortion of ordinary beliefs and expressions” (832). Crucially, Dickens treats this removal into the legal sphere as an ontological shift that represents a loss of reality: in short, the legal “reality” that Bourdieu speaks of essentially represents a form of derealisation in Dickens’ novel. Typically, John Jarndyce complains that the actual nature of the situation is lost to Richard because “lawyers have twisted it into [...] a state of bedevilment” (88): “all this business puts us on unnatural terms, with which natural relations are

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11 The introduction to my Norton Critical Edition of Bleak House states, “[a]s a map of central London can show, most of the law colleges, offices and residences were within easy walking distance of each other [...] conveniently clustered [...] in a small area, less than a square mile in size—a city within a city” (xix-xx).
incompatible” (464). In *Bleak House*, indeed, law’s symbolic power of naming figures as a form of transubstantiation: that is, anything that is involved in a Chancery-suit is essentially swallowed into the non-world. Indeed, John Jarndyce understands that Richard’s involvement with Chancery-lawyers,

has warped him out of himself [...] Rick mistrusts and suspects me—goes to lawyers, and is taught to mistrust and suspect me. Hears I have conflicting interests; claims clashing against his, and what not. [...] His blood is infected, and objects lose their natural aspects in his sight. (434-5)

Clearly, the suggestion is that Richard has in effect been “warped” out of reality. Moreover, this dynamic pertains not only to the ontological status of Chancery-suitors, but also to the legal professionals. The wholesale absorption into the legal field of the law-office clerk “sagacious Mr. Smallweed” (246) represents a striking case in point:

he is never to be taken in; and he knows all about it, whatever it is. In short, his bringing up he has been so nursed by Law and Equity that he has become a kind of fossil Imp, to account for whose terrestrial existence it is reported at the public offices that his father was John Doe, and his mother was the only female member of the Roe family (247)

Mr. Smallweed—so very well-versed in law—evidently inhabits the legal field to the detriment of his “terrestrial existence,” which is all but retracted because he is conversant *only* with the legal field. Being “in Chancery,” then, amounts to being transported into a different world.

The legal sphere is accessed, as Bourdieu suggests, by “actors possessing a technical competence which is inevitably social” (817). As indicated, Bourdieu marks how the judiciary’s power is founded on practices of exclusion that establish “a social division between lay people and professionals” (817). This divide is highly visible in Dickens’ non-world heuristic, in which we find, on the one hand, “the lawyer [...] dwelling among mankind but not consorting with them” (514), who is “steward of the legal mysteries” (14), and, on the other hand, the outsider-suitor who is subject to court procedures, if not un-moneyed and therefore undesirable, in which case “the Chancellor is legally ignorant of his existence” (7). That is to say, the differing abilities of lawyers and laypeople to navigate the legal field fundamentally separates the junior clerk Mr. Guppy—who declares that, “[b]eing in the law, I have learnt the habit of not committing myself in writing” (359)—from George who, without the legal disposition, is made awkward by “documents” and thus requests guidance on
entering court, confessing, “I don’t understand these places” (309). George is indeed the perfect contrast to the “gentlemen of the bar in wigs and gowns” who are “perfectly at their ease, by no means in a hurry, very unconcerned, and extremely comfortable” (307)—he is kept “on a constant see-saw” (566) by the judiciary.

Bourdieu’s notion that the “[t]he juridical institution promotes an ontological glorification” (846) in the case of *Bleak House* signifies an ontological degrading. Herein it is important to note that Chancery’s aspect of nothingness for Dickens’ laypeople also intimates that this system is quite superfluous. Thus, typically, Dickens’ third-person narrator delights in the fact that although the country goes for a period without government, “England has not appeared to care very much about it, but has gone on eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage” (496). In other words, Dickens wields the intangibility of the legal-political system against that same system, suggesting that it is quite *immaterial*—of no bearing whatsoever to Londoners’ everyday lives, except where it interferes. The non-world heuristic is in other words also a *making nothing* of the law.12

The disjunction between ordinary, everyday reality and the “unnatural terms” of Chancery amounts to what Thomas Pavel terms an *ontological layering*: a “two-level ontology possessing a set of entities which belong to both levels” (153). Pavel understands that modernity brings an “ontological pluralism whereby the users of ontologies have a choice between several ontological landscapes” (155), and that this may result in an agonistic cultural condition of “ontological stress” (157). Dickens’ Chancery-suitors, ever trading in the wrong currency, are clearly afflicted with this form of destabilising ontological uncertainty. They are incapable of making the “conversion of mental space” that law requires and are thus bewildered by the discrepancy between the accustomed significance of their personal affairs and the significance that law’s naming ascribes to them.

Symbolic power is, of course, not exclusive to the law. As Bourdieu affirms, the power of naming also resides to a great extent within the field of *cultural production*, among writers and artists who, like the judiciary, endeavour to shape the world by “transforming the words for naming it.” Thus, Bourdieu understands that cultural producers wield:

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12 And yet, of course, it is made abundantly clear that the law does interfere, everywhere, Chancery generating the omnipresent fog and the newly formed London Police dispelling it.
the properly symbolic power of [...] revealing in an explicit, objectified way the more or less confused, vague, unformulated, even unformulable [sic] experiences of the natural world and the social world, and bringing them into existence. [...] they may also, in the logic of their struggle within the field of power, put their power at the service of the dominated in the social field taken as a whole ("Intellectual" 146)

_Bleak House_ may, then, like the institution of Chancery, be understood as transforming categories of perception and evaluation that participate in producing the social world; indeed, for Bourdieu, influential art and literature may even bring about a “symbolic revolution, which overturns mental structures and deeply upsets people’s minds [...] the revolution _par excellence_” (149). Noting that _Bleak House_ decries “Fine Arts” for its reluctance to “receive any impress from the moving age” (BH 145), the Bourdieusian critic Kieran Dolin argues that Dickens calls for such a symbolic revolution in vying with “alternative versions of literature and art, notably romantic and aristocratic ones” (12). Dolin rightly suggests that, “[t]he symbolic form he proposes brings into view the lives of those denied legal identity or a legal voice” (12). Dickens’ representation of law, as we have seen, describes the fate of outsiders in a legal non-world. Indeed, in this respect, Dickens’ description of Chancery is aligned with, if not akin to, Bourdieu’s critical practice, which also strives to make the legal sphere accessible by describing it as inaccessible to those who lack an appreciation of the rules of the game.

Dickens’ inaccessibility-heuristic is, moreover, an exemplary illustration of Bourdieu’s claim that the cultural field possesses the symbolic power of naming “the unnameable, that which is still unnoticed or repressed” (“Intellectual” 149). In short, Dickens’ novel targets a potential conceptual deficit and proffers a conceptual model for amending it. As already indicated, this model is bound up with Dickens’ valorisation of the real. Importantly, as Pavel declares:

> Neighboring ontologies always lead to a process of ontological focalization, to a sorting out, to an ordering of the ontologies in place by the assignment to each of an importance index. The most important ontology may then play the role of absolute norm, of a high court which summons neighboring ontologies for control and justification.

(155)

This is highly pertinent to Dickens’ treatment of Chancery as a non-world, which, as I have illustrated, places law on a second, lesser, ontological plane, contrasting its superimposed, false terms with the pre-juridical “real”. In short, with Pavel we might
affirm that Dickens sits himself in a “high court of ontology” and rules law less real. In light of Bourdieu’s and Pavel’s analysis, Dickens’ treatment of Chancery as a non-world may thus be understood not only as a heuristic, but also as a strategic move on the part of a cultural producer vying with the legal field in a struggle for symbolic power.

As we have established in this section, Dickens’ description of the legal field sets up a heuristic double ontology of non-world Chancery and real-world London. Chancery constitutes a domain within the fictional world of *Bleak House* that can be accessed only by characters carrying legal degrees, a realm that members of the laity are liable to fall into without finding a conceptual foothold. In the next section we shall consider Dickens’ non-world heuristic in terms of *possible-worlds* theory and the aesthetic-philosophical tradition of the *sublime*.

**Negative presentation**

The non-world heuristic of *Bleak House* may fruitfully be considered in the terms of possible-worlds theory, a branch of literary criticism seeking to gauge how fictional worlds become accessible to the inhabitants of other worlds. Significantly, Umberto Eco—a leading theorist of possible worlds—suggests that “one way of thinking about accessibility intuitively would be in terms of psychological *conceivability*, a second world is accessible if it can be conceived by inhabitants of the first world” (qtd. in McHale 35). Eco in other words holds that inter-world accessibility is fundamentally a matter of “conceivability.” This is highly pertinent to our scrutiny of Dickens’ non-world heuristic, in so far as Chancery bureaucracy’s many small deferrals and displacements, in the eyes of Dickens’ laity, amass to a “system” that is inconceivable as such. Here I wish to bring possible-worlds theory into dialogue with discourse on the sublime.

Significantly, Jameson theorises the debilitating difficulty of “think[ing] the impossible totality of the contemporary world system” as the *postmodern sublime* (38); in other words, Jameson draws on the tradition of the sublime to describe the “enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions” (38). Strangely, Jameson simultaneously invokes this sublime heritage and holds that the aesthetic of cognitive mapping he envisions must be *sui generis*. The framework of the sublime, I believe, is the place to start also when theorising Dickens’ representation of Chancery as a non-world. The sublime, as
outlined by Immanuel Kant in the masterful *Critique of Judgment* (1790), constitutes a fraught (but after Kant’s manner of reasoning ultimately triumphant) mental response to natural phenomena of incomprehensible “absolute greatness” (*mathematical* sublime) and overwhelming “might” (*dynamic* sublime). A typical motif of romantic art is thus the sizeable and mighty in nature (mountains, oceans, etc.).

Dickens’ writing, as Ronald R. Thomas suggests in “Dickens’s Sublime Artifact,” participates in expanding and transforming the sublime aesthetic to social and manmade domains (74). Thomas describes the Dickensian sublime as essentially an urbanisation of the sublime aesthetic, affirming that the “sheer fact of the modern city evokes in Dickens a notion of the sublime” (78); thus Thomas focuses on description of London in reading *Bleak House* and does not consider the sublime sensibility of Dickens’ portrayal of Chancery, only inadvertently remarking that Chancery’s discursive practices may leave London “overwhelmed by a sea of paper” (85, italics mine). And yet, of course, this phraseology is borrowed from Dickens’ description of Chancery in terms of the “mountains of Wiglomeration” (434), the “dead sea of the Chancery suit” (472) and the “immense desert of law-hand and parchment” (567). Indeed, Dickens’ representation of Chancery as conceptually inaccessible to the laity leans heavily on the sublime tradition. That is to say, Dickens’ novel stresses the sheer size of the legal-political system—“[The country’s] system of equity is a very great system, a very great system. […] This is a great system […] and would you wish a great country to have a little system? Now, really, really!” (740-1)—and that the judiciary’s force is such that “no human power” would be able to “counteract […] and prove too strong for it” (435)—a sentiment that is borne out by the combative Mr. Gridley’s tragic end. In short, Dickens’ laypeople cannot grasp the legal sphere, its proportions seeming to exceed the measurable and its force apparently impossible to overcome.

The sublime non-world, as I contend, has important implications for theorising the possibilities of fictional worlds as such. Marie-Laure Ryan charts inter-world access in “Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations” by investigating how various characteristics of fictional worlds determine the capacity in which they become accessible to readers and how fictional worlds are permeable to each other. Importantly, Ryan contends that, “[i]f we want to avoid the embarrassment of speaking of impossible possible worlds of fiction, we must accept a much wider range
of accessibility relations” (558). However, a “wider range of accessibility relations” would be so capacious as to include its outside if non-worlds—that are accessible only as inaccessible—were to be included. Ryan understands that the accessibility of a textual world “presupposes the text’s ability—that is the implied speaker’s willingness or authority—to establish the facts of the [world]. When epistemic access to these facts is denied, the world at the centre of the textual system fails to ‘solidify’” (566). However, the obverse appears to be true for Dickens’ non-world: it “solidifies” in and by the denial of epistemic access. The legal sphere fails to solidify for Dickens’ laity, which conversely allows for its appreciation—as inaccessible—by the reader (and by the cannier characters of the novel such as John Jarndyce).

That is, *Bleak House* provides conceptual access precisely when it declares law’s inaccessibility. This heuristic form of accessibility is markedly reminiscent of Kant’s notion that a work of art may give a sense of the sublime only negatively. The critic Werner Hamacher provides a helpful explication of Kant’s concept of negative presentation in his investigation of how writers may deal fruitfully with the sublime, a situation in which “the imagination cannot correspond in any positive manner to the natural phenomena whose exhibition and presentation it aims to accomplish” (273). For Hamacher, writers striving to produce “what necessarily cannot be adequately presented in any thought, any intuition, or any feeling” (273) may write “the text of the inadequacy of every attempt to recount such events so as, modo negativo, to write the measureless text of these events themselves” (278). In other words, a presentation of the inaccessible may succeed by virtue of ostensibly falling short. Indeed, *Bleak House* is arguably a “text of inadequacy” of Hamacher’s description in so far as the non-world heuristic grants access by thwarting it. Of course, Dickens’ negative presentation of the law features alongside “positive” presentation and indeed ironic presentation, but the former is particularly well suited to giving the reader a sense of law’s inaccessibility.

The technique of negative presentation has a marked presence in *Bleak House*, and does not only figure in the portrayal of Chancery. Typically, Esther’s narrative abounds with notes on an ephemeral, shady and somehow ineffable reality; she regularly confesses her shortcomings in her capacity of narrator (usually deferring to her “guardian”) thus conforming to Dickens’ ideal of womanly bashfulness. Interestingly, Esther’s self-deprecat ing reluctance to narrate authoritatively spills over also in her musings on strictly private impressions and sense perceptions; thus, for
instance, Esther reaches in vain for the word to describe an “undefinable impression” (380) and feels that “something for which there was no name or distinct idea was indefinitely lost” (538). The lack of access attested here—a matter of inscrutable, indescribable sense perception—is strikingly acute. Esther’s inability to find the word which does justice to her experience testifies to the difficulty of rendering reality (naming), and yet, importantly, her professed inability also effectively authorises the object of thwarted reference as real. In other words, Esther’s frustrated attempts at veracious story-telling actually vouchsafes the independent existence of the object she seeks to describe; indeed, Esther’s efforts say, much like Richard does at one point in the novel, “Somehow, I mean something that I can’t very well express, but you’ll make it out” (287).

Dickens’ use of Kantian negative presentation is herein reminiscent of Roland Barthes’ famed reality effect, the ostensibly “useless” detail that is so very central to realist writers’ manner of impressing readers with a sense of narrative authenticity (142). Barthes’ semiotic analysis, in other words, alights on the importance of matter-of-fact description of mere details that are quite superfluous to the narrative but are therefore able say “nothing but this: we are the real” (148). In Bleak House negative presentation functions as an obverse form of the Barthesian reality effect, suggesting communication with an anterior reality by declaring it inaccessible. As stated, Bleak House departs from Watt’s concept of realist writing. In Bleak House, certainly, words do not “convey the knowledge of things”, instead they obscure in fog. On the contrary, a lack of words is the surest route to access. Indeed, Barthes’ conceptualisation of realism—which highlights an “opposition of the true-to-life (the lifelike) and the intelligible” (146)—arguably better provides for theorising the realism of Bleak House.

Barthes’ sentiments are echoed in Foucault’s understanding that modernity is thoroughly “imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought” (Order 323), and in Jameson’s notion that modern literature may be understood as an “insatiable colonization of the as yet unexplored and inexpressed […] an impulse in which realism can be said to share the telos that modernism only more stridently affirms and sloganizes” (Antinomies 31). Dickens’ explorative impetus, fueled by the onus on modern man to “think the unthought,” undeniably informs his close attention to the inaccessibility of Chancery. Esther, John Jarndyce and Gridley routinely profess their inability to articulate the phenomenon of Chancery, thus spelling out its
inaccessibility. Interestingly, this ineffability brings about a tension between law’s status as less real and unnameable, or real, in Dickens’ treatment of Chancery as a non-world.

Lynn Festa, a prime exponent of Bill Brown’s thing theory, describes how an unpaired shoe in Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe “loses its usability and in its uselessness, it becomes all the more materially present” (460)—indeed, Festa holds that “for the purposes of formal realism, the unpaired shoe is better than the paired one” (460). The realism that inheres in the negative presentation of Bleak House is clearly in the same vein as the pronounced usefulness of the strictly useless “thing” which Festa describes. Crucially, for Festa, Robinson Crusoe is a novel which,

narrates through description both encounters with the unintelligible—
the battery of external impressions not yet assimilated to an idea or a world—and the reprocessing of these inchoate encounters into intelligible experience, exposing the work performed by description in shoe-horning the recalcitrant raw material of the world into ideas or concepts. (454)

Bleak House, as already indicated, also “narrates” encounters with the unintelligible through description. However, the question remains whether the no-thing (Chancery) may itself be gleamed. There is a crucial difference between the Chancery suitors’ desperate attempts to “shoe-horn the recalcitrant raw material” of Chancery into an idea or concept and the reader’s woes, who as opposed to Dickens’ suitors may also delight in Chancery’s nothing. Thus, the thinghood of Chancery is still somewhat curtailed by its continued aesthetic function.

Chancery’s non-world character partly serves to highlight the reality of enveloping London. All the same, Dickens’ pervasive use of negative presentation to describe the ineffable, pre-discursive “real” creates an abiding sense that non-world Chancery is the most real, precisely by virtue of its being inaccessible and ineffable. Indeed, Dickens rather welcomes the resistance Chancery offers in and by its maddening intangibility. As Eagleton aptly puts it, “Dickens is forced [...] to use as aesthetically unifying images the very social institutions [...] which are the object of his criticism” (129). In so far as non-world Chancery is the figurehead of Dickens’ attempt to “think the unthought” it is inextricably linked to his realism. Here, essentially, in and by Dickens’ multifaceted use of negative presentation, realist aesthetic clashes with aesthetic of cognitive mapping. Ultimately, this destabilises the
dichotomy of non-world Chancery and real-world London, but arguably without complicating or detracting from the heuristic model.

In light of our discussion of the sublime non-world’s negative accessibility in *Bleak House*, we are now in a position to give something like a definition of the non-world: essentially, the non-world is accessible through recognition of its inaccessibility. The first part of this paper has dealt primarily with the conceptual inaccessibility inherent to the legal field. However, Dickens’ laity’s difficulty grasping Chancery is aggravated in so far as it lacks familiarity with the phenomenon of bureaucracy. In the following two parts of this essay we shall consider the greater inaccessibility experienced by Dickens’ suitors in failing to comprehend bureaucracy. First we shall examine the role of legal discourse.

**Ink(lings) of the real**

*Bleak House* is, with Mikhail Bakhtin, a *heteroglossic* novel in so far as Dickens’ dialogues room multiple heterogeneous linguistic registers, or *sociolects*, rather than a single, unified brand of English. In this, importantly, Dickens describes the specialised discourse of legal practitioners as a language of its own: “legal ‘chaff’ inexplicable to the uninitiated and to most of the initiated too” (233). In Dickens’ novel, importantly, in accordance with Bourdieu’s suggestion that the social division between law and laypeople is “visible particularly in relation to language” (829), the distinct linguistic capabilities of legal professionals and laypeople determine their positions in the legal field. In this respect, the language barrier that the Chancery suitor encounters feeds into Dickens’ heuristic which detaches Chancery from London at large. The separateness of legal discourse is conspicuous in *Bleak House*, in the somewhat ridiculous Mr. Guppy’s (mis)use of the only language he knows—“our law terms, miss” (113)—in proposing to Esther by “fil[ing] a declaration” (113), as well as in Mr. Vholes’ rhetorical manipulation of his client Richard. Indeed, when Vholes’ vocabulary begins to seep into Richard’s misguided professions that he is making progress with the suit, Richard comes across as a mere ventriloquist’s dummy: the borrowed phraseology makes abundantly clear that Richard’s notions are not his own but have been artfully instilled in him—in short, they are not his own words.

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13 Guppy later retracts his offer (after Esther has been disfigured by illness) using the most elaborate technical excuses while requesting a statement of acknowledgement of the dissolution of the proposal from Esther. She is only too happy to oblige him in this.
Typically, Dickens’ characters, like the novelist himself, wield the symbolic power of naming law. John Jarndyce coins the expression “Wiglomeration” to connote opaque legal discourse, professing that, “[i]t’s the only name I know for the thing” (91). Of course, this long, Latinate, bureaucratic-sounding word—a portmanteau of sorts (wig and conglomeration)—indicates that legal discourse is verbose and convoluted, and thus purposely unintelligible to the laity. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the term “Wiglomeration” possesses a pronounced dialogic character—it is a dialogised utterance directed against another social language. The coinage itself bespeaks Dickens’ project of delineating bureaucratic institutional power: Dickens forges a new vocabulary by which he indicates law’s conceptual inaccessibility and thus begins to describe the nature of the judiciary.

Chancery’s indigestible discourse, crucially, epitomises law’s inaccessibility in *Bleak House*. This goes against D. A. Miller’s declaration that if *Bleak House* is a mystery novel it is, certainly not because the suit itself is a mystery [...] the suit may be read fully and at leisure: in the reams of dusty warrants, in the tens of thousands of Chancery folio-papers [...] nothing about the suit is secret or hidden [...] All that is ever unavailable is the dead legislator’s intentions. (63)

To Miller’s mind, then, Chancery documents are readily available simply because they are there to be perused. This does not, however, chime with Dickens’ description of legal discourse as “inexplicable to the uninitiated.” Miller’s notion of Chancery as a transparent organisation is clearly unsatisfactory. Indeed, Chancery documents do certainly not represent “leisurely” reading for Dickens’ laypeople; legal discourse in fact *mystifies*. Whenever Esther visits Richard in exile she finds him at his desk “making most energetic attempts to unravel the mysteries of the fatal suit” (218); similarly, the deceased Tom Jarndyce has scrutinised “wicked heaps of paper in the suit [...] hoping against hope to disentangle it from its mystification and bring it to a close” (89). In short, Chancery suitors are ever examining legal documents without the slightest hope of edification.

In this connection it becomes interesting to consider J. Hillis Miller’s hugely influential first essay on *Bleak House*—“Interpretation in *Bleak House*” (1971)—which contends that the “interpretation of signs or of texts may be said to be the fundamental theme of the novel” (35). Miller writes:
“Nothing ever ends”—an important thematic stand of the novel is the special mode of temporal existence in an unjust society, or perhaps under any social order. Such an order has replaced realities by signs, substances by shadows. Each sign, in such a “system,” refers not to a reality but to another sign which precedes it and which is pure anteriority in the sense that it refers back in its turn to another sign (44).

For Hillis Miller, in other words, Chancery’s never-ending chain of solipsistic signifiers defers the event of reality as such. Voicing this post-structuralist commonplace, Miller is notably unspecific about the sort of social order that “replaces realities by signs” suggesting that it occurs “perhaps under any social order”; for Miller, crucially, the “guilty party is not any person or persons, not correctable evil in any institution. The villain is the act of interpretation itself [...] irremediable. It is inseparable from language and from the organisation of men into society” (39). While hugely influential, this reading of Bleak House has also had its detractors—notably, D. A. Miller (who takes the Foucauldian position vis-à-vis the Derridean) in decrying his namesake J. H. Miller’s concept of Bleak House as typifying the blindness of deconstructive critics to text as a power technology (63). And yet, as we have seen, D. A. Miller himself mystifies institutional power’s inaccessibility.

In Bourdieu’s description law presides over a symbolic power which merely masquerades as a matter of interpretation (823). The judiciary possesses the “socially recognised capacity to interpret a corpus of texts sanctifying a correct or legitimised vision of the social world” (817), but this is largely, as already indicated, a sham. In this light, the suitors’ attempts to wrap their heads around legal discourse are quite futile: defeat is tragically preordained in so far as the mysteries of Chancery are not to be unravelled by recourse to legal documents—instead answers have to be sought in an investigation of the workings of the legal field. This is the riddle of Chancery, which Dickens puts to his readers, a riddle that Hillis Miller and D. A. Miller inevitably fall short of solving.

For the suitors who wish to penetrate Chancery’s mysteries there is, moreover, extensive reading to be done. Legal documents and law-writing paraphernalia abound in the pages of Bleak House. Lawyers carry documents in “blue bags” between Court and offices, hand them to copyists, etc.14 Importantly, if legal chaff, as we have established, is indecipherable to Dickens’ laypeople, as something...

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14Daniel Hack suggests that, “Bleak House’s engagement with the physical materiality of writing may well be the most intensive of any Victorian novel” (38).
like a language in its own right, Chancery’s great reliance on “documents” itself represents a conundrum. That is, bureaucratic practices are described in *Bleak House* as an unfamiliar, and indeed excessive, sheer volume of writing. When convening in court, the legal professionals typically have, “bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters’ reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them” (6). John Jarndyce complains that, “everybody must have copies, over and over again, of everything that has accumulated about it in the way of cartloads of papers” (88); these “cartloads of papers” are, in other words, illegible to the laity also in and by their very quantity. Here, importantly, the “mountains of nonsense” take on a particularly sublime aspect. In Mr. Snagsby’s clerk-supplies shop, typically, there are “articles too numerous to mention” (116)—and the subsequent mentioning of these articles seeks to impress, through the double bind, that they are boundless. Similarly, there is something testing the limits of the measurable in the court’s lumbering onto, “[q]uestion (number five hundred and seventeen thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine)” (483). Bureaucratic legal discourse—law’s existence on pen and paper as it were—in other words sets Chancery apart from London at large as a world of words.

Summing up this section, we have established that law’s illegible linguistic production figures prominently in Dickens’ non-world heuristic. Legal discourse constitutes a separate social language incomprehensible to the laity, but also a bureaucratic procedure involving an unintelligible volume of writing. However, as we continue to unravel the mysteries of Dickens’ non-world in the next section, we shall see that the mountain of written nonsense that is Chancery all the same represents the mere tip of an iceberg.

**A little non-world of its own**

Bourdieu notes that the modern judiciary “cannot be separated from the emergence of writing” (845). Indeed, Bourdieu and Foucault alike (two thinkers who were notoriously otherwise rarely in agreement) argue that the spread of writing was an important factor for the emergence of modern institutional power. This is a standpoint that *media theorists* such as Marshall McLuhan and Friedrich Kittler have expanded on in their analysis of the spread of literacy. For Kittler—who builds specifically on Foucault’s analysis of power—the introduction of a new media technology establishes new discursive practices; thus, Kittler notes that the early novel was instrumental in
generating the linguistic competence that is bound up with the operation of Foucauldian “power technology”. Interestingly, D. A. Miller’s essay brings this perspective to bear on *Bleak House*, ultimately denouncing the novel as implicated in the formation of the very institutional power that it rebukes. That is, as Miller very cuttingly puts it, “the Victorian novel establishes a little bureaucracy of its own” (76). Miller proposes that,

> despite or by means of its superficially hostile attitude to bureaucracy, a novel like *Bleak House* is profoundly concerned to train us—as, at least since the eighteenth century, play usually trains us for work—in the sensibility for inhabiting the new bureaucratic, administrative structures (76).

Miller, in other words, declares *Bleak House* a training apparatus preparing its readership for catering to institutional power. Moreover, Miller holds that certain formal qualities of *Bleak House* make it particularly culpable in this respect—primarily its great length and the detective-work involved in reading a novel with multiple, seemingly disjointed, plot-strands. In Miller’s words, “[t]o submit to the novel’s duration is already to be installed within an upbeat ethic of endurance” (78).

Of course, Miller’s Kittlerian analysis of the novel as instrumental in the rise of institutional power flies directly in the face of Dickens’ pathos. To Miller’s mind, Dickens’ critique of Chancery is undermined at the level of its discursive effects—the mentality, habits and skill-set his novel instils. Miller’s reading effectively changes the conversation by denouncing *Bleak House* as self-defeating in this respect, a methodological triumph (if one accepts Miller’s line of argument) for the media-theorist against proponents of a formalist, text-immanent literary criticism. However, as I shall contend, Miller’s analysis also helps shed light on the narrative of *Bleak House* and is relevant to a formalist reading of *Bleak House*. The fact that *Bleak House* comes to resemble Chancery has been noted by several critics of the formalist inflection, J. Hillis Miller included; however, crucially, neither J. H. nor D. A. Miller considers the possibility that *Bleak House* resembles Chancery by Dickens’ contrivance. There are, however, reasons to suggest that Dickens obliquely addresses the formal self-contradiction Miller points out. The novel’s critical stance toward the spread of writing arguably constitutes a self-reflexive manoeuvre navigating the very issue Miller’s essay alights on.

The similarity of *Bleak House* and its motif is indeed made curiously explicit in the novel. Dickens enumerates Chancery’s “every difficulty, every contingency,
every *masterly fiction*” (22, italics mine), its “numerous difficulties, contingencies, *masterly fictions*” (760). Such (meta-fictional) winks to the reader at beginning and end of the novel, certainly demonstrate an awareness of the critical tension between the novel and its object of critique. Dickens appears to *thematis* his writing’s status as a text which parallels Chancery’s ignominious bureaucratic discourse in sheer volume. Thus, one great irony of the novel is that, halfway through, Dickens’ reader—much like the lawyers engaged in Jarndyce and Jarndyce—finds herself “still taking stock, still examining papers, still going over heaps and heaps of rubbish” (490), and when the novel (at long last) comes to an end—together with the suit “Jarndyce and Jarndyce”—“great bundles of paper began to be carried out—bundles in bags, bundles too large to be got into any bags, immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes” (865). In other words, Dickens’ description of Chancery as both a “masterly fiction” and a “heap of rubbish” rebounds—and is arguably invited to do so—on the novel itself. Miller, who contends that “the novel runs the risk of resembling the Chancery suit that it holds in despite” (75), fails to notice that this is a “risk” Dickens willingly accepts.

Miss Flite simultaneously lists Chancery’s evils and the names of her birds as: “Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, *Words […]*” (180, italics mine). Indeed, Dickens’ distrust of “words” clearly runs deeper than pertaining to Chancery alone—his portrayal of writing of “all shapes and no shapes” is remarkably critical; whereas legal documents are in the foreground, the novel is in fact steeped in suspicion of signs and distaste for those with superior access to them. Indeed, Dickens consistently describes linguistic cultural capital as bound up with domination through knowledge. Thus, the predatory Chancery-lawyer Mr. Vholes is accompanied, in Dickens’ gallery of villains, by the falsifying public house-minstrel Little Swills, the aesthete Mr. Skimpole who impales unsuspecting Londoners on his wit, the magniloquent preacher and insatiable dinner guest Mr. Chadband, the sweet-talking, backstabbing Mr. Smallweed and the “Telescopic Philanthropist” Mrs Jellyby who is ever handling correspondences about “Africa” instead of her troubled children. Crucially, as indicated, the disreputable deeds that these wretches execute are speech acts. Conversely, Dickens’ endearing characters generally lack linguistic skills: Richard suffers from legal discourse’s illegibility, George’s difficulties stem from his having “no head for papers” (338), and Jo’s tragedy is quite simply his illiteracy. In and by persistently describing linguistic mastery as morally compromising (and
Dickens’ novel is not merely critical of bureaucratic practices, then, but also of the spread of writing. Here it is important to note that *Bleak House* is something as uncommon as a distinctly heteroglossic novel which, paradoxically, harbours an idealist—in Bakhtin’s terms centripetal—conception of writing as homogenous. Whereas the portrayal of legal discourse as inexplicable to Chancery-suitors lays bare the existence of disparate, socio-economically stratified forms of language, *Bleak House* also brings the letter-writing philanthropist and the aesthete together as kindred symptoms of a society where written discourse plays an increasingly prominent, detrimental role. In this, rather than differentiating between various forms of writing, Dickens draws a hard line between literates (of all sorts) and sorry illiterates like Jo and Krook. It is arguably owing to the stark terms of this pronounced language barrier that we get a different charge from *Bleak House* than from most other heteroglossic novels.

Dickens’ novel clearly desires to offer resistance to the mounting societal importance of writing, and yet as a widely circulated serial novel it must necessarily spur that trend on. In this, Dickens’ somewhat quixotic campaign against the spread of writing constitutes a perfect illustration of Eagleton’s thesis that Dickens’ late novels offer their “self-contradictory forms and internal inconsistencies as part of historical meaning” (129). However, as suggested, the internal inconsistency we have identified is not simply a “historical” effect oblivious of its own workings (as Miller would have it): rather, the contradiction looms large in the narrative. The early novel’s role in the formation of institutional power in other words needs to be understood as feeding into Dickens’ narrative. Clearly, *Bleak House* is a text scandalised by writing that cannot but deconstruct itself; and yet Dickens’ novel in a sense precedes the “always already” of self-contradiction by addressing its own status as a piece of writing. Of course, Dickens certainly never strays to problematise the role of novels or newspapers directly (which would waylay the critique of Chancery), and yet, the novel’s commentary on discourse, which in effect disparages fiction and the spread of writing, reverberates with a keen sense of the materiality of *Bleak House*. There is a suggestion that Dickens, in a rather Brechtian manner, seeks to manifest the conflict inherent in his enterprise so as to harness and utilise it. In short, Dickens’ emphasis on the semblance between Chancery and *Bleak House* has a touch
of the “alienation” or “interruption” of the Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*. It is of course debatable whether Dickens can be credited with operating at this meta-textual level. However, Dickens clearly wields a double-edged sword in critiquing the spread of writing.

In his essay responding to D. A. Miller’s reading of *Bleak House*, Dominick LaCapra suggests that Miller’s analysis “tends to lose sight of the potent critique, indeed the grotesque carnivalisation, of bureaucracy in *Bleak House*,” and in turn proposes that, “Dickens must use fire to fight fire” (136). My contention is ultimately that the carnivalisation of Chancery in *Bleak House* extends to the very “bureaucratic” formal qualities of the novel. Indeed, the reader’s situation comes to mirror the predicament of the suitor trapped in non-world Chancery, in so far as the novel resembles Chancery and asks its reader to close the book as it were. The ensuing sense of entrapment in text is vertiginous if not sublime. In this sense, the novel’s negativity toward the medium of writing could be appreciated as another assault on Chancery. As Mr. Boythorn declares, dismantling institutional power will never be straightforward:

> There never was such an infernal cauldron as that Chancery, on the face of the earth! [...] Nothing but a mine below it on a busy day in term time, with all its records, rules, and precedents collected in it, and every functionary belonging to it also, high and low, upward and downward, from its son the Accountant-General to its father the Devil, and the whole blown to atoms with ten thousand hundredweight of gunpowder, would reform it the least!” (108)

If Dickens’ description of Chancery as an intangible tangle of texts deliberately ties the novel and its theme together, we might take it that *Bleak House* descends into the “infernal cauldron” of Chancery—with the host of letter-writers and phrase-mongers to bring the kettle to a boil—in order to implode a “mine” beneath Chancery’s textual foundation.

Dickens’ account of the spread of writing, as suggested, divides London into literates and illiterates, describing the former social realm as inaccessible to the illiterate population. In the next section we shall consider how London in this respect comes to resemble non-world Chancery.

**The illiterate’s London**

If Dickens’ Chancery-suitors suffer at the hands of indecipherable bureaucracy, the illiterate Jo is equally victimised by being situated in an utterly mystifying London of
written signs. Jo’s tragic fate is that he lacks access—conceptually as well as materially—to a London increasingly governed by writing. Jo is frustrated to tears by his incomprehensible environment; he speaks English—well, almost, his coarse language does not belong properly to the English of Dickens’ novel—but is still a veritable foreigner in London, essentially because he cannot read. He is perennially stood outside, “staring up at the great letters […] which have no meaning in his eyes” (562). Instead of rendering his environment meaningful these letters engender conceptual inaccessibility: “all that unaccountable reading and writing […] Jo, and the other lower animals, get on in the unintelligible mess as they can” (199). Wherever Jo stops or sits down an officer promptly appears and tells him to “move on”, Jo’s inability to read street-signs dictates that this spoken command should await him at every street corner. When the question is raised where Jo is in fact supposed to go, he receives no good answer: “‘My instructions don’t go to that,’ replies the constable. ‘My instructions are that this boy is to move on’” (238). London is thus truly inaccessible to Jo.

London has become so given over to practices of reading and writing that Jo is not merely peripheral, but firmly outside. Crucially, Dickens’ third-person narrator understands that Jo is not “of the same order of things, not of the same place in creation. He is of no order and no place” (565). Here, as with the dichotomy of Chancery and London that we have traced in previous sections, London is ontologically rent in two, as the illiterate’s London and the London of writing. The cornerstone of this ontological layering is Dickens’ othering of Jo, evident, for instance, in the third-person narrator’s declaration that,

It must be a strange state to be like Jo! To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes, and in utter darkness as to the meaning, of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! To see people read, and to see people write, and to see the postmen deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language… [Jo’s] whole material and immaterial life is wonderfully strange” (198).

Here the third-person narrator finds an insurmountable obstacle to thought in Jo’s inner life, just as Jo lacks access to the London of written signs. The sense of an aportia—or, a critical divide—is likewise notable in the narrator’s declaration that, “From the boy’s face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach” (243-4). That is, the third-person narrator must surmise what London’s many
signs signify for Jo. Indeed, the narrator finds Jo quite as “out of reach” as the “great, confused city” is thought to be to Jo. The “strangeness” of “Jo’s ideas” (198), in other words, works both ways: the London of signs is inaccessible to Jo, but Jo’s mental life is therefore equally inaccessible to those who do belong to that greater sphere. Here we might consider Alan Palmer’s notion that thought has a “public nature” in Dickens’ London, as characters are able to penetrate into each others’ minds through clues gleaned by, for instance, “reading facial expressions” (106-9). In this sense, Jo’s inner life is not strictly private: rather it is accessible as inaccessible. However, more direct access to other people’s minds is only permitted in Bleak House between members of the same greater linguistic community.

Dickens’ third-person narrator rather condescendingly suggests that Jo, “sums up his mental condition, when asked a question, by replying that he ‘don’t know nothink’” (197). Crucially, Jo’s performative claim to know “nothink” (not even correct pronunciation) places him on the far side of the divide between meaning and intelligibility. As Kevin McLaughlin aptly puts it, “Jo seems to remain nearly out of sight [...] at the limit of the representational space [...] fundamentally not presentable” (Paperwork 84-5). In the epistemology of Bleak House, which privileges negative presentation as a mode of knowledge, Jo’s unrepresentable experience of London represents an elevated reality. Typically, Dickens has the preacher Mr. Chadband inform Jo that, “it is because you know nothing that you are to us such a gem and jewel” (242). Dickens also cherishes Jo’s perspective. Much like Mr Chadband, Dickens banks on achieving a narrative effect with Jo. It is much by his proxy that Dickens seeks, with Foucault, to “think the unthought,” or the “nothink.” Dickens prises the illiterate’s experience of inaccessible signs because, as indicated, this experience is itself inaccessible. In other words, Jo’s “strange” reality, which Bleak House pines for, puts the third-person narrator in the same place as Jo: without words. Thus, Jo is, in the last, much like Chancery a motif of a reality beyond words.

The illiterate’s experience of London, then, is important because it represents a reality unstained by ink. Indeed, there is a, markedly Romantic, sense in which Jo’s illiteracy permits him to see through the fog of empty signifiers that proliferate in London; the preacher visiting Tom-all-Alone’s thus typically sounds to Jo as if he is “a speakin’ to his-self, and not to me” (571). The fact that Jo “knows nothing” does in other words not prevent him from discerning the self-serving inaccessibility of the symbolic power brandished by the clergy. The narrator’s appraisal of Jo ultimately
also finds that he is, “not quite in outer darkness. There is something like a distant ray of light” (138). Typically, Jo gives a “terrible yawn” (243) during the “eloquent” Mr. Chadband’s verbose sermon and (on a different occasion) falls asleep (322), clearly unimpressed by grand rhetoric masking “abominable nonsense” (245). If Richard, as John Jarndyce suggests, has been “infected” by the world-view of Chancery lawyers, Jo’s illiteracy indeed represents a vaccine against such corruption.

The illiterate’s lack of access to London underscores the non-world heuristic at work in Dickens’ representation of law, echoing it and highlighting the role of cultural capital as a key permitting entry to various social spheres. And yet, the very multiplication of ontological layers also complicates and unsettles the established dichotomy of non-world Chancery and real-world London. Indeed, it becomes apparent that Chancery’s extreme saturation with writing does not make it the antithesis of London at large, since the latter excludes Jo according to similar mechanisms. Chancery is rather the microcosm of a London which is permeated by writing that too. Here we begin to perceive Dickens’ extended use of the non-world heuristic, which is by no means confined to describing Chancery; Dickens’ treatment of London extends, develops and cements its presence in the novel.

We have, in this second part of my paper, scrutinised the role of inaccessible discourse in Dickens’ non-world heuristic. Next we shall examine how Chancery’s strange spacetime impacts on Dickens’ laypeople.

Non-world spacetime

The non-world heuristic of Bleak House may be conceptualised, with Wesley Kort, as a space-dominated narrative. Indeed, Kort cites institutions, such as “hospitals, prisons, the military”, as examples of fictional environments which largely determine “who will appear and what will go on” (16). Kort understands that when “place takes on characteristics of an antagonist”, the characters of a space-dominated narrative find themselves threatened “by pervasive, indefinable, and malign conditions, and they are not likely to know how to contend with them” (17). This is clearly the case in Dickens’ narrative of suitors struggling to plot a course in the conceptually challenging legal system. Indeed, Kort’s analysis is very much in line with Jameson’s notion of an aesthetic of cognitive mapping, suggesting the merits of the space-
dominated narrative as a mode of delineating conceptually inaccessible, incapacitating environments such as the law, or indeed the contemporary world system.

*Bleak House* situates the High Court of Chancery, rather nebulously, “at the very heart of the fog” (6), refusing to delineate the exact premises of the judiciary. This is symptomatic of the legal-political system’s structural dispersion, which, as seen, offends Mr. Gridley. The representatives of the law, as Jo puts it, appear “in all manner of places, all at wunst” (559); thus, the lawyer Mr. Tulkinghorn is, “[a]lways at hand. Haunting every place” (575), and similarly, “[t]ime and place cannot bind Mr. Bucket” (626). Chancery, in short, consists of a number of courts (not just the High Court of Chancery), as well as lawyers’ offices, Inns of Court, abodes of copyists, clerk-supplies shops, etc. Crucially, the “wicked transcendence” of the legal system is partly that it is a dispersed structural institution never fully present in one self-contained “place.” As Henri Lefebvre attests in *The Production of Space*, the judiciary has “no need of the mediation of the concept of space to achieve self-representation [...] fall[ing] within the political space of the state” (281). This lack of a clearly demarcated place translates in the eyes of Dickens’ laity to its falling outside of space altogether, as a *non-place*. In other words, because the law is to be found in all manner of places all at once Dickens’ laity understands that it exists in no place at all.

This is also basically the standpoint of D. A. Miller. Miller proposes that Dickens’ representation of law in *Bleak House* constitutes a break with the dichotomy of “places of confinement” and “space of freedom” (59) that informs Dickens’ earlier conception of society. In *Bleak House*, as Miller puts it, the judiciary’s operations “far exceed the architecture in which it is apparently circumscribed” (60). Miller therefore concludes that,

> What Chancery produces, or threatens to do, is an organization of power which, ceasing entirely to be a *topic*, has become topography itself: a system of control which can be all-encompassing because it cannot be compassed in turn. (61)

In *Bleak House*, then, law’s ubiquity and lack of clearly demarcated place suggests, to Miller’s mind, the Panoptic nature of social control. However, this reading goes against the grain of Dickens’ representation of law, which, as we have established, hinges on delineating law’s separateness. Indeed, the fact that Chancery cannot be

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15 Here Dickens’ treatment of law and law enforcement converge.
located in any one single place in Dickens’ London rather sets it apart. In lieu of architectural space which contains it, Chancery constitutes a separate type of spatiality. The legal sphere’s spatial makeup is less a matter of “place” than what Foucault, in the essay “Of Other Spaces”, terms a site—that is, a (structuralist) space characterised by relations to other parts in an informational network.

In *Bleak House*, I suggest, the legal system stands as the arbiter of a new type of socially produced space, where “place” must stand back for delocalised space. Dickens’ Victorian laypeople are very much products of the Enlightenment episteme geared toward the certitudes of homogenous time and space. Indeed, their fatal inability to perceive and respond capably to the space of institutional power is epitomised by the allure that Chancery Lane holds for them; in other words, primed to look for self-contained place they are compelled to look even harder in the case of Chancery. As Miss Flite testifies, “there’s a dreadful attraction to [Chancery]. There’s a cruel attraction in the place. You can’t leave it. And you must expect” (440). Thus, Miss Flite is “always in court, from its sitting to its rising” (7), despite the fact that her presence is utterly pointless. Moreover, Miss Flite is happy enough to live in a flat “from which she ha[s] a glimpse of the roof of Lincoln’s inn Hall” (53). Soon also Richard has “begun to haunt the Court” (287), and finds accommodation in the vicinity in order to be “near the offices, and near Vholes” (612). Indeed, at the end of the novel, Richard has been reduced to “one of the stock sights of the place”, “haunt[ing] the Court day after day; listlessly [sitting] there the whole day long” (730)—in short, he has become yet another ghostly figure haunting the “place”, or rather the non-place, Chancery. Dickens’ space-dominated narrative in other words depicts a laity drawn like flies to the non-place of Chancery, only to be badly burnt.

Bewildered by the rhizome-like dispersion of Chancery, Dickens’ suitors are, then, caught unawares by a shift in the social production of space. When Dickens’ suitors come up against a faceless bureaucracy they have to contend with a new spatiotemporal configuration the unfamiliarity of which severely curtails their agency. The legal professionals, conversely, are in tune with this organisation of social space; during the “long vacation” of summer typically, court rises and promptly shoots off (with the funds extracted from the lawsuits), leaving the suitors for dry, hopelessly rooted to the non-place Chancery:

Scarcely one is to be encountered in the deserted region of Chancery Lane. If such a lonely member of the bar do flit across the waste, and
come upon a prowling suitor who is unable to leave off haunting the scenes of his anxiety, they frighten one another, and retreat into opposite shades. (233)

This description of the depopulated Chancery district in-between terms clearly points forward, to the emptied workspace-by-day environments of later capitalism (Jameson’s postmodern *hypespace*), while also suggesting the discrepancy between those who are able to navigate the new spatiality—the “members of the bar”—and those who fail to do so. During the long vacation Chancery court is truly empty, dispersed and idle:

> the bar of England is scattered over the face of the earth [...] dispersed fragments [...] found on the canals of Venice, at the second cataract of the Nile, in the baths of Germany, and sprinkled on the sea-sand all over the English coast (232-3).

This image of power reiterates Chancery’s ties with the new form of dispersed, delocalised spatiality—here in the shape of international tourism.

Importantly, Dickens’ Chancery-suitors agonise not only over the unfamiliar spatial manifestation of Chancery, but also over the protracted length of Chancery suits, the intermittency of suits being called up in court, the unwieldy cycles of court terms—in short, the *temporality* of Chancery. Thus, Richard’s involvement in the “perennially hopeless” (8) Jarndyce and Jarndyce-suit, continued under an “eternal heading” (8), all the same has him “driving away at speed to Jarndyce and Jarndyce” (471) whenever it beckons. We should, in other words, note Mikhail Bakhtin’s stricture, in the widely influential essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel”, about the inseparability of time and space in literary narratives. Bakhtin—one of the first important thinkers of narrative spacetime—uses the term *chronotope* to denote spatiotemporal units of narratives, arguing that in fiction “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought out concrete whole” (84).

With Bakhtin, we may affirm that spacetime forms a “carefully thought out concrete whole” in Dickens’ portrayal of non-world Chancery-suitordom. The integrity of time and space in Dickens’ representation of law is epitomised in Richard’s comparison of his limbo-like suitor’s existence to living in an “unfinished house” (288, 462). For the suitors, then, the great system of Chancery is more than an unintelligible non-place, it is also an inconceivable length of time; thus, John Jarndyce wonders that, “through years and years, and lives and lives, everything goes on, constantly beginning over and over again, and nothing ever ends” (88). Richard, tied
to the slow revolutions of Chancery terms, likens himself to Ixion, eternally bound in Hades to an always-turning wheel of fire (484), much as Tom Jarndyce attests that being in Chancery is like “being ground to bits in a slow mill […] being roasted at a slow fire” (52). In short, Chancery-suits carry on indefinitely, in direct contempt of suitors’ hopes that the bar should in due course come to some conclusion. Typically, Dickens contrasts the lethargic court-proceedings with the speed at which court adjourns and Chancery terms cease: “The Chancellor is, within […] ten minutes ‘up’ for the long vacation” (484), thus prefiguring the sudden termination of “Jarndyce and Jarndyce.”

There is, then, a sense that bureaucratic Chancery-time is dislocated from ordinary social time. As Miss Flite aptly puts it, Chancery-proceedings are “a little slow for human life” (179). Miss Flite refers to her birds, in declaring, “[t]heir lives, poor silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings” (53), but of course the same goes for her fellow suitors: disputed wills are, crucially, in Chancery several generations on. Thus, if “Jarndyce and Jarndyce was the curtain of Rick’s cradle” (435), by the same token, it becomes his winding-sheet. The cruelly disproportionate length of suits thus suggests a dehumanised temporality. This is underlined by the jagged intermittency of court hearings that flit, seemingly haphazardly, between suits that are momentarily “on the paper” (288) only to be thrown back on the pile without moment’s notice. In short, court pays no heed to those concerned in suits—it goes its own course, at a rate starkly at odds with the needs of the community it allegedly serves.

Chancery-time wiles away suitors’ lives pending a settlement that never materialises, but also in a way wiles away time as such. Richard testifies that, “[t]here’s no now for us suitors” (462), and the narrator rejoins that, in Richard’s non-world existence pending a court ruling, we find, “[e]verything postponed to that imaginary time! Everything held in confusion and indecision until then!” (464). Standard time, then, does not quite go for Chancery. The laypeople of the novel are as incapable of resetting their mental clocks to accord with Chancery-time, as they are of redrawing their mental maps. This is apparent in how Richard attempts to justify his course of action to Ada by proposing that, “the longer [the suit] goes on […] the nearer it must be to a settlement one way or other. Now, is not that reasonable?” (164). This chopperical rhetoric typifies how Dickens’ Londoners must negotiate Chancery-time. Richard’s sentiment does enough to placate Ada, but only grudgingly:
there is still a sneaking suspicion that the linear forward-motion of time is made questionable in the case of Chancery. Indeed, if the unfamiliar dispersion of Chancery’s structural organisation is appreciated as placelessness, the dehumanised temporality of the law is equally felt as an absence of time.

As J.J van Baak aptly puts it, “chronotopes define particular types of space in their functional relations to particular types of plots” (46). This is evident in Dickens’ space-dominated narrative. Indeed, the tragic fates of Dickens’ suitors—Tom Jarndyce, Mr. Gridley, Miss Flite (and her entire family before her, one by one drawn by the suit), as well as Richard—follow a similar trajectory. First Dickens’ suitors visit Chancery Lane in pursuit of settlement. Hardwired to “place,” they commence to orbit around court, responding to the unfamiliar dispersion of the legal field by overcompensating and remaining still more attentive to the locations of Chancery, thus aggravating their problems. Thereafter Chancery holds its suitors in a state of prolonged suspense, thwarting any expectations they might hold in a most taxing manner. Invariably the suitors lose their wits or perish before a settlement has been reached.

In this section we have established that Chancery-spacetime transgresses the laity’s mindset in a manner suggestive of a shift in the social production of space and time. The resultant non-world chronotope is central to Dickens’ treatment of Chancery as a social domain inaccessible to members of the laity. Next we shall situate Dickens’ non-world chronotope historically in terms of developments in the social production of spacetime.

**Chancery’s unreadable floor-plan**

For Bakhtin, as Simon Dentith notes, “transformations in the chronotope [...] are to be explained by historic transformations” (53). In order to unpack how the non-world chronotope is bound up with societal changes, we shall in this section consider Dickens’ treatment of Chancery spacetime in light of Frederic Jameson’s and David Harvey’s description of literary trends as hinging on concomitant developments in capitalism. Adopting the theoretical frameworks of these scholars, Dickens’ take on Chancery may be understood as anticipating, if not belonging to, a new phase of capitalist society in so far as it marks a shift from place to space (and onto Foucault’s “site”). Jameson famously argues that the three phases of capitalism outlined by Ernst Mandel—market capitalism, imperialism and multinational capital—are accompanied
each by a distinctive space-time and thus also a new literature. For Jameson the three stages are tied to “three general revolutions in technology” (Postmodernism 35) that occur in 1848, 1890 and 1940 respectively. This provides the basis for Jameson’s periodisation of modern literature. Jameson understands that classical market capitalism, and thus also realism, is defined by “geometrical and Cartesian homogeneity, a space of infinite equivalence and extension”, a “logic of the grid” (410), and moreover states that the “emergence of this kind of space will probably not involve problems of figuration as acute as those we will confront in the later stages of capitalism” (410). With the stage of imperialism however, and the rise of international capitalism, the logic of the grid is unsettled by “new and enormous global realities [...] inaccessible to an individual subject or consciousness”, “ultimately unrepresentable” (411), feeding into modernism. In “late” capitalism, subsequently, the “great global multinational and decentered communicational network” has “succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organise its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world” (44), a predicament which for Jameson defines postmodernism.

Finance capitalism, then, opens up an increasingly deterritorialised space that is difficult to fathom. One cannot “see” a decentred structure of global interconnectedness—it is a realm beyond experiential categories. As already indicated, Jameson holds that the inability to map this internationalised social geography spatially is “crippling to political experience” (416), but that art and literature may help provide a basis for orientation, and thus also for social and political agency. This will not be accomplished however, Jameson declares, without great ingenuity:

new political art (if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of [...] the world space of multinational capital—at the same time as it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing the last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positions as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralised by our spatial as well as our social confusion. (54)

As I have argued in previous sections, Dickens’ non-world take on institutional power confirms to Jameson’s envisaged aesthetic of cognitive mapping. This suggests that the first phase of capitalism (in Mandel’s tripartite periodisation) is not quite the prelapsarian age of capitalism that Jameson makes it out to be; Bleak House deals
emphatically with the “problems of figuration” that Jameson holds to be peculiar to modernist and postmodernist art and literature.

Dickens’ non-world chronotope may be contrasted with Jameson’s notion of realist treatment of space and time, as outlined at greater length in “The Realist Floor-Plan”. In this essay, Jameson historicises realist fiction—specifically the writing of Dickens’ contemporary Gustave Flaubert—as a mode of writing engaged in re-habituating, or “reprogramming”, people to the new world of empiricism and industrial capitalism (373); indeed, Jameson holds that the “ideological mission of the nineteenth century realistic novelists is in a virtual or symbolic way to produce this whole new spatial and temporal configuration itself” (374). Jameson argues that description in realist writing foregrounds sheer temporal and spatial position in order to fabricate “the grey world of quantity and extension, of the purely measurable [...] the new physical and measurable temporality of the clock” (374). This realist, matter-of-fact brand of description (description for description’s sake)—familiar from Watt’s and Barthes’ account of realism—may be said to result in a stylistically empiricist (positivist) spatiotemporal presentation. As already indicated however, Dickens’ representation of law in Bleak House is, conversely, concerned with describing the “unseeable”. That is, Dickens seeks to describe inaccessible phenomena that defy the “realist floor-plan.” The non-world heuristic of Bleak House may thus—in contradistinction to Jameson’s concept of realism—be understood as dismantling the “grey world of quantity,” “re-programming” people’s mindsets to accord for the problematic spacetime of bureaucratic institutional power. Bleak House essentially formulates an unreadable floor-plan detailing the very inaccessibility of Chancery’s spacetime to members of the laity.

The Marxist geographer David Harvey, as stated, shares Jameson’s notion that developments in modern literature are connected to revolutions in the social production of space and time. However, Harvey’s analysis diverges slightly from Jameson’s apropos the first phase of capitalism: if Jameson describes the Enlightenment conception of time and space as having prevailed until the 1890s, Harvey conversely argues that the destabilisation of homogenous Cartesian time and space is initiated with the systemic crash of 1847-8, the first economic crisis of capitalism. Harvey holds that this financial crisis manifests the insecurity of the credit system and of fictitious capital formation, and thus announces the interconnectedness of near and far; that is, for Harvey the economic crisis was also a “crisis of
representation” that “challenged the simple mathematical presuppositions of Enlightenment thinking” (*Condition* 261). To Harvey’s mind this was no rude awakening however—it shook artists and philosophers out of their Enlightenment slumber, but the corollary in literary treatment of space and time is still *fin-de-siècle* modernism. Harvey describes writing from the second half of the 19th century as lagging hopelessly behind the new “intertwined world” of global capitalism, which was such that, “Realist modes of representation, which took a simple narrative structure as their model, simply could not do the job (no matter how brilliantly Dickens raged across time and space in a novel like *Bleak House*)” (“Between” 427). As I have demonstrated however, Dickens’ non-world chronotope is a mode of representation that is well appointed to coming to grips with the perplexing new spacetime. *Bleak House*, then, written and published in the aftermath of the first financial crisis, suggests that the crisis of representation has a tangible impact on literature earlier than Harvey allows.

We have situated Dickens’ treatment of inaccessible Chancery-spacetime historically, as reflecting a shift in the social production of space-time from self-contained “place” to the dislocation and interconnectedness that defines later capitalism. *Bleak House*—a novel which belongs historically to the initial phase of capitalism—is in other words far from undisturbed by the representational difficulties that Jameson and Harvey view as characteristic of the art of later phases. That is not to say that the conceptual maps of modern literature that these scholars provide need to be fundamentally redrawn. I have sought to demonstrate precisely that *Bleak House* represents an important forerunner of the pedagogical art that Jameson requests.

The next section concerns the discourse on internationalisation in *Bleak House*. As I shall argue, Dickens’ novel not only reflects the aforementioned shift in the social production of space and time, but also connects this thematic to the internationalising economy which is its root cause.

**The global non-world**

In 1851, Dickens visited the Crystal Palace—the first World Exhibition, a glass-edifice celebrating the fact of globalisation, at least in name (*Cambridge Companion* 111). *Bleak House* was published the year after, and contains vicious sallies against internationalisation which indicate that Dickens was decidedly not impressed.
Foster 46

Dickens’ jeering commentary on “Telescopic Philanthropy” is as rancorous and vitriolic as his take on Chancery, bespeaking an intense suspicion toward the very notion of international community, or cosmopolitanism. Indeed, (with benefit of hindsight) one senses great alarm in Dickens’ attempts to belittle proponents of foreign aid, who are described in purely farcical terms as part of Dickens’ attempts at writing off internationalisation as inherently ludicrous. In Dickens’ conservative outlook, in other words, there is clearly nothing sublime about the budding global world system. As I propose however, the non-world heuristic of Bleak House may profitably be read as pertinent to the phenomenon of internationalisation as well as to bureaucratic institutional power. Thus, typically, whereas the Chancery-lawyer “can see nothing but fog” (6), the leading Telescopic Philanthropist—Mrs. Jellyby—“can see nothing nearer than Africa!” (37); crucially, neither lawyer nor philanthropist has eyes set on London. In this and other ways, as we shall see, Dickens’ critique of Chancery runs parallel to his palpable mistrust of internationalisation.

Dickens’ promotion of the welfare of fellow Englishmen figures in Bleak House as a stern rebuke to philanthropists whose heads have been turned by the dazzling “telescopic” perspective of the overseas:

[Jo] is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle’s Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby’s lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article [...] Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him: native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee. (564).

Here Dickens pits Jo against the overseas-recipient of charity, intimating that Jo is not “interesting” enough to win him the attention he sorely needs (simultaneously Dickens couches a deft defense of Bleak House as a narrative about domestic affairs, as opposed to fantastic, exotic fictions—a defense of formal realism in other words). Ironically, Jo “sits down to breakfast on the door-step of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts” (198-9); in other words, the attention of such societies to heathens in far off places blinds them to the poor and the needy right

16Frank Christianson devotes a chapter of Philanthropy in British and American Fiction to “Dickensian Realism and Telescopic Philanthropy”; as Christianson declares, “[t]he telescopic nature of Jellyby’s and Pardiggle’s stems from their literal and emotional distance from their beneficiaries” (91).
outside. Dickens suggestion is, in short, that increasing internationalisation infringes on and jeopardises the domestic community.

Importantly, Chancery, too, imperils the domestic, chiefly by “annexing” estates into the juridical realm pending settlement in never-ending suits, what Dickens terms the, “entanglement of real estate in meshes of sheep-skin” (392). Indeed, the apparent placelessness of the legal institution threatens to expand and engulf all of England in so far as Chancery “has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire” (6). Here, the London slum area known as Tom-all-Alone’s constitutes an important case in point:

This desirable property is in Chancery, of course. It would be an insult to the discernment of any man with half an eye, to tell him so. Whether ‘Tom’ is the popular representative of the original plaintiff or defendant in Jarndyce or Jarndyce […] nobody knows (198).

In short, Tom-all-Alone’s—an “infernal gulf” (277) that Dickens’ respectable Londoners will descend into only with a policeman-cicerone—has cracked open on account of estates being kept in Chancery overlong. In this sense, “black and foul Tom-all-Alone’s” (281)—a “desert region unfit for life” (551) with its “crazy houses, shut up and silent” (553)—epitomises the threat of greater non-world derealisation.

In this respect it is significant that Bleak House—the place that gives the novel its name—was faded by its involvement in the “Jarndyce and Jarndyce” suit. As John Jarndyce declares: “Although Bleak House was not in Chancery, its master was, and it was stamped with the same seal. These are the Great Seal’s impression, my dear, all over England—the children know them!” (89). Here, the suggestion is that a home which bears the stamp of the Chancellor’s “great seal”, has been sealed up as it were. Crucially, Tom Jarndyce—the previous resident of Bleak House—desperately pursued settlement in Chancery and in the meantime,

the place became dilapidated, the wind whistled through the cracked walls, the rain fell through the broken roof, the weeds choked the passage to the rotting door. When I brought what remained of him home here, the brains seemed to me to have been blown out of the house too; it was so shattered and ruined. (89)

In *Bleak House*, then, the “place” imperilled by Chancery’s derealisation is typified by the domestic institution.

*Bleak House* is to great extent a story of domesticity lost and regained, and, importantly, the domestic is essentially refurbished in order to function as a stalwart against the new spatio-temporality heralded by the institution of Chancery. The
domestic drama of the novel chiefly concerns whether or not Esther’s arrival at Bleak House will represent a true homecoming—whether Esther is able to repair “shattered and ruined” domesticity. That is, Esther, Ada and Richard move in with John Jarndyce in Bleak House as a part of John Jarndyce’s scheme of rebuilding a family home broken by involvement in Chancery. Crucially, John Jarndyce—the architect of a project to reinstate domesticity in Bleak House—has, in short, brought this pseudo-family together under that roof so that it might in time “heal some of the wounds made by the miserable Chancery suit” (43). John Jarndyce’s efforts, then, stand as a direct counter-measure to the menace of the legal non-world which threatens to expand far beyond Chancery Lane.

Esther is sensitive straight away to the stark contrast, indeed, the opposition, between Chancery and domesticity: “It touched me, that the home of such a beautiful young creature should be represented by that dry official place” (31). Moreover, importantly, before Ada and the other two “young creatures” find themselves “Quite at Home” in Bleak House in Chapter 6, they are treated to a glimpse of domestic disrepair, its causes and its consequences, staying one night in London at the house of John Jarndyce’s friend Mrs. Jellyby (the Telescopic Philantropist), before travelling to St. Albans and Bleak House the next day. They arrive to find Mrs. Jellyby busy writing letters concerning unfortunates in far-off places, without a thought to spare for her unkempt and miserable children. Here, in springing to the defence of domesticity, Dickens displays a conservative attitude pertaining simultaneously to women’s role in public life and to the notion of international solidarity (cosmopolitanism). Crucially, Mrs Jellyby, like the philanthropic community at large in Dickens’ description, neglects the domestic. Mrs. Jellyby’s fallen household is, moreover, markedly reminiscent of Tom Jarndyce’s Bleak House, the home that John Jarndyce is engaged in restoring to its former glory. Institutional power and internationalisation—two central concerns of Bleak House—are thus thematically connected. The overnight stay with the Jellyby’s, during which Esther begins to make “a home out of even [that] house” (42), thereby sets the stage for the domestic drama which unfolds when Esther, Ada, and Richard begin their stay with John Jarndyce.

On arriving at Bleak House, Esther finds the household keys awaiting her in a basket on her bed and is “quite lost in the magnitude of [her] trust” (65). Esther is tasked with becoming the angel in Bleak House, with conferring domesticity thereupon. As Nancy Armstrong aptly puts it regarding the frailty of the domestic in
Dickens’ writing, “To construct and preserve this world [...] requires unflagging concern and vigilance [...] and this is where the female ideally figures in” (128). In Esther’s competent hands Bleak House soon grows more colourful, as is illustrated by her acceptance of her guardian’s proposal of marriage. And yet, this marriage ultimately never comes about—instead, by a rather unexpected turn of events, Esther marries doctor Allan Woodcourt, though still by John Jarndyce’s devices, to become the “mistress” of a second Bleak House, a facsimile of the first, built by Jarndyce. The precise import of this peculiar denouement of the drama of domesticity has been much debated by critics; McLaughlin observes that Bleak House “opens with the threat posed to the institution of the home by the radical disorder of the official legal institution” (“Losing One’s Place” 230) and argues that the “doubling” of Bleak House suggests that domesticity as such is “founded by displacement” (238). However, McLaughlin’s reading does not account for the fact that the “doubling” of Bleak House resides within a recurrent pattern of displacement: thus, also Chancery—the institution which threatens Bleak House—has a namesake in Krook’s rag and bones-shop, commonly known as “the Court of Chancery” (50). Krook himself claims: “There’s no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle” (51), and when Krook dies of “Spontaneous Combustion,” he dies the “death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made” (403). Doubling is in other words not a phenomenon peculiar to the institution of the home, but is rather an important iteration of a greater pattern of displacement.

Indeed, the role of domesticity in Bleak House needs to be understood in terms of the novel’s overarching response to the perceived danger of the new spacetime manifested in the shape of both Chancery and Telescopic Philanthropy. In Bleak House, then, there is indeed cause for “unflagging concern and vigilance”; Chancery threatens the domestic in and by the very fact of its seemingly placeless structural organisation but also, directly, by its confiscation of real estate, and Telescopic Philanthropy likewise does so by menacingly intertwining London and the overseas. Here, in the drama of domesticity, these two parallel concerns of Bleak House

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17Harking back to our examination of the role of writing in Bleak House, Chancery bureaucracy and Mrs. Jellyby’s Telescopic Philanthropy are arguably also braided together in so far as Dickens’ philanthropists are ever composing letters to each other, leaving their homes, and by extension London at large, “littered with waste-paper and Booriboolan documents” (371), essentially sweeping the city away in dispatches of letters.
intersect. As suggested, Mrs Jellyby’s decrepit household serves as a backdrop for the central drama of *Bleak House*, the story of perishing suitors and of places rendered void in Chancery. Thus, the non-world heuristic straddles the critique of Chancery and the suggestion that internationalisation will hamper welfare at home, damage the domestic.

As I have sought to establish here, Dickens’ denunciation of so-called Telescopic Philanthropy essentially reviles the cosmopolitan ethic. *Bleak House* in other words sees Dickens engage in a markedly regressive protectionism. Dickens’ drama of domesticity, and its happy ending, may thus be understood as an attempt at revoking the shift toward dispersion in the social production of spacetime that occurs with increasing internationalisation. This ill-advised endeavour clearly has rather bleak prospects. And yet, it is noteworthy that Dickens’ concerns about Chancery’s delocalised structural organisation resurface in his portrait of philanthropists oblivious to their immediate surroundings, or, in Dickens’ terms, to reality. In this respect, albeit in the very act of venting a narrow-minded mistrust of cosmopolitanism, Dickens in fact begins the work of articulating the nature of a foggy global world system that rises up from the Thames. Indeed, Dickens’ novel ultimately suggests that internationalisation, like Chancery, will make a non-world of London. That is, Dickens cautions his reader not only about Chancery’s derealisation, but also about a greater non-world in embryo: England if the overseas were to be invited closer.

**Conclusion**

By highlighting Dickens’ emphasis on Chancery’s conceptual inaccessibility—its excluding formalism, its anomalous voluminous textual production and dispersed spatio-temporality—I have shown that *Bleak House* paints a comprehensive picture of law’s opacity for a Victorian laity. Dickens’ astute way of spelling out the inaccessibility of institutional power in *Bleak House*, as I have argued, may be conceptualised as a non-world heuristic. My billing of Dickens’ representation of law as a non-world heuristic answers to its character of what Wesley Kort terms a space-dominated narrative: that is, the legal system itself—its structure and its environs—

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18 And yet, the critical stance which stresses the importance of the local has of course figured prominently in successful combative anti-globalization movements.
functions as the adversary of Dickens’ members of the laity, who wrestle with its material and conceptual unavailability.

Significantly, Dickens’ portrayal of Chancery-suitors’ loss of agency in a conceptually inaccessible environment, as I have demonstrated, conforms to Frederic Jameson’s description of an “aesthetic of cognitive mapping” equipped to combat socio-geographical disorientation. The importance of mental readiness for navigating and inhabiting a social landscape is manifest in Dickens’ narrative, much as it is in Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological analysis of the legal field and Jameson’s take on “late” capitalism; Dickens’ laypeople are disadvantaged in this respect by the excluding social mechanisms of the legal field, leaving them vulnerable to canny, predatory lawyers, just as hapless inhabitants of Jameson’s “global world system” are easy prey for, say, nationalist propaganda or invading multinational corporations.

The legal field’s inscrutability to the laity is, of course, an abiding state of affairs—however, as I have shown, Bleak House describes a pronounced inaccessibility which owes to Dickens’ laity’s unfamiliarity with bureaucracy. As D. A. Miller addresses in his Foucauldian reading of Bleak House, Dickens’ novel responds to the increasing importance of institutional power and bureaucratic administration in Victorian England. Miller holds that Dickens’ delineation of law (and law enforcement) marks the onset of Panoptic total control; however, whereas Chancery indeed has a devastating hold on the laypeople of Dickens’ novel, I have shown that this firm grasp has quite as much to do with the unavailability of empowering conceptual models to navigate institutional power by. Indeed, Dickens’ Chancery suitors are essentially victims of their outmoded mindsets; like the man from the country in Kafka’s fable “Before the Law” they are deceived in part by their own expectations.

Chancery-bureaucracy departs from the laity’s horizon of expectation chiefly in and by its copious documentation and its structural dispersion. Importantly, these features of bureaucracy are in Dickens’ treatment essentially labelled derealising, which further suggests the non-world character of Chancery. That is, if Chancery’s pervasive conceptual inaccessibility is what renders it a non-world in the first place, then law’s non-world status is also bound up with Dickens’ description of the legal domain and all its activities as immaterial, intangible, parasitic—in short, less than real. Dickens’ fictional world is, with Thomas Pavel, ontologically layered in such a way that non-world Chancery stands as the antipode of real-world London. Thus, in
so far as people, places and things are quite liable to be seized by the judiciary, their reality is at risk. In short, what Bourdieu terms law’s symbolic power of “naming” reality is here represented as a translation of ordinary everyday life into an “unnatural”, unreal state; this is, of course, Dickens’ manner of wielding symbolic power against the law.

Dickens’ thematisation of Chancery as a derealis ing realm is, as already indicated, bound up with its aspect of being a world of words lacking place and time. Chancery exists, as it were, only on paper (legal documents). In this respect Chancery is, interestingly, doubly inscribed as a world of words and a world beyond words. As I have traced, the non-world is endowed with a sublime aspect in so far as Dickens’ Chancery constitutes an immense and indefatigable “system” that is fundamentally “unpresentable”. Importantly, in fashioning the non-world heuristic of Bleak House, Dickens employs what Immanuel Kant terms negative presentation; that is, Bleak House makes the inaccessible phenomenon accessible by ostensibly failing to present it. Dickens’ use of negative presentation, as I have established, functions as an obverse form of the Barthesian reality effect: declaring that the signified object lies beyond words implies its genuine, albeit inaccessible, existence. Negative access is thus credited as a form of superior epistemological certainty: the route to the real is access to inaccessibility. In short, the “unfinished house” of Chancery stands on a foundation of a persistent discourse on the limits of cognition, language and knowledge, where Esther’s well-nigh pathological hermeneutical uncertainty represents an important building block. As stated, this feature of the novel serves to underscore and elevate the heuristic value of Dickens’ treatment of Chancery as a non-world, but also figures as a realist technique.

Moreover, non-world Chancery is a timeless non-place in so far as it contradicts the laity’s concept that it should abide by (keep up with) the human time-span and be immediately and consummately present in a single architectural “place.” Adopting Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, and the perspectives of thinkers of literary spacetime in Bakhtin’s wake, especially Marxist thinkers such as Frederic Jameson and David Harvey, I have traced how the conceptual struggle of Dickens’ Chancery-suitors reflects a shift in the social production of space and time. Essentially, the dispersed and delocalised structural organisation of Dickens’ Chancery leaves its suitors dazed and confused because it supersedes their concepts of space and time (shaped in the Enlightenment episteme). Indeed, Dickens’ take on
laypeople bemused by Chancery spacetime is markedly reminiscent of Jameson’s description of guests’ experience of the ground-breaking Bonaventure Hotel, which, much like Chancery, “aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city” and, crucially, as a microcosm of postmodern hyperspace, confounds attempts at cognitive mapping (Postmodernism 40).

Interestingly, Bakhtin contends that, “[t]he image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic” (85). Here Bakhtin points to Kant’s understanding that space and time constitute, in Bakhtin’s words, “the indispensable forms of any cognition, beginning with elementary perceptions and representations” (85). These dicta are quite pertinent to Dickens’ sublime non-world. We may take it that the always-chronotopic “image of man” is fundamentally contested by the sublime spacetime of non-world Chancery and, indeed, likewise by the global world system. Interestingly, Foucault contradicts the Kantian grounds for cognition propounded by Bakhtin, in polemically claiming, “It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man’s disappearance” (Order 343). This begs the question whether chronotopes are intrinsically anthropomorphic. Must the space-dominated narrative that cognitively maps dehumanising systems essentially challenge the image of man? I shall not undertake to answer these questions here—suffice to say that the non-world chronotope, in my view, consolidates rather than departs from Bakhtin’s notion in and by its pronounced heuristic function.

As I have shown, both aspects of the non-world heuristic that we have examined as cases of inaccessibility specific to the context of bureaucracy’s expansion in Victorian England—the unfamiliarity of Chancery’s textual production and spatiotemporal organisation—are features that tie in with Dickens’ greater concerns about the direction in which society is headed. Bureaucracy’s disturbing dispersion and lack of immediacy are, in short, threads taken up also in the novel’s commentary on the spread of writing and on increasing internationalisation. Thus, the illegibility of Chancery-discourse is mirrored in the illiterate Jo’s experience of London, and, similarly, the structural dispersion of Chancery is paralleled in Dickens’ take on so-called “Telesopic Philanthropy” as a social force purveying an ill-advised cosmopolitanism. Following the narrative undercurrents that weave these concerns together, I have alighted on several iterations of the non-world heuristic in Bleak House: that is, not only Chancery, but also the London of written signs and the London of increasing internationalisation are described in terms of inaccessibility and
derealisation. Indeed, Dickens comes across as fearful that his beloved city of London will end up a non-world as such.

Here *Bleak House* embattles the home as a bastion against this threat. Clinging to the preceding era’s dominant form of spatiality (“place”), Dickens lays emphasis on the *domestic* in a manner which reads as a hopeful attempt at warding internationalisation off. Dickens’ rejection of international community (in the shape of overseas philanthropy) is indeed a disconcertingly retrograde facet of the novel’s response to the social production of a new dispersed spacetime. The case of *Bleak House* does, in other words, not support Kort’s contention that “negative places and placelessness are preliminary [...] to the more important task of retrieving or adumbrating positive place-relations” (21). It is conversely the emphasis on “negative place” in Dickens’ space-dominated narrative that constitutes the novel’s most resourceful response in terms of a Jamesonian aesthetic of cognitive mapping; the proposed retreat to snug domesticity will do little to help combat institutional power or prevent socio-economic inequity in a global world system.

Crucially, Dickens’ portrayal of Chancery as a non-world constitutes a striking example of a distinctly modern *terra incognita*: that which opens up right under one’s feet. Indeed, capitalism continues to spew up new spatiotemporalities at a rate that inevitably throws people off—the non-world therefore arguably represents an important chronotope of modern literature. I suggest that the non-world heuristic may be found, broadly, in space-dominated narratives that describe some form of conceptually inaccessible environment. The heavily policed, and conceptually challenging, parish of Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* (1967) springs to mind as a quintessential non-world, though this is of course not to say that the non-world heuristic and law are somehow especially closely entwined. Latter-day iterations of the non-world heuristic would not for that matter have to be directly related to internationalisation either—and yet, in the era of globalisation it may seem somewhat inevitable that they are; at least, this is the case if we accept Jameson’s, to my mind greatly instructive, contention that the capitalist world system has a pervasive (indeed global) impact on cultural production. Jameson contends that modernist (and post-modernist) experimental forms,

whose content is generally that of privatized middleclass life, nonetheless stand as symptoms and distorted expressions of the penetration even of middleclass lived experience by this strange new global relativity of the colonial network. The one is then the figure,
however, deformed and symbolically rewritten, of the latter; and I take it that this figural process will remain central in all later attempts to restructure the form of the work of art to accommodate content that must radically resist and escape figuration (412).

Crucially, then, for Jameson, globalisation is at the root of modernists’ and postmodernists’ attraction to the elusive. Taking this (somewhat reductive but as stated also very helpful) suggestion onboard, an unmistakable non-world may be found present *ex post facto* in Virginia Woolf’s “Kew Gardens” (1919), where a gentle garden paradise is cruelly blotted out in the last by the sudden eruption onto the text of the roaring cityscape. A non-world is also “negatively” present (still in Kant’s sense) in Wallace Stevens’ poem “Of Mere Being” (1957) which describes an accessible-as-inaccessible landscape hovering “at the end of the mind/Beyond the last thought.”

Ultimately however, non-worlds will likely come to the fore in space-dominated narratives that endeavour to map and re-imagine social geographies in order to enable socio-political agency. The usefulness of the non-world heuristic in performing the work that Jameson sets out for the aesthetic of cognitive mapping (that of providing conceptual access to one’s environment in the globalised world) may in other words be further explored as it figures in *postcolonial* writing and *world literature*. Here I wish to briefly sketch the possible application of the non-world heuristic in this respect, basically as food for thought. To my mind, core issues in post-colonial theory, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s concept of *subalternity*, are marked by the very problematic of inaccessibility and representation that the non-world heuristic embodies. Literature grappling with these contentious and thorny questions will therefore likely seek to provide access to the very fact of inaccessibility in order to prevent debilitating ontological stress and provide for agency (in the same vein as Dickens’ critique of Chancery). As Neil Lazarus understands, many post-colonial theorists hold that language is “not only world-disclosing but also world-constituting” (11)—thus, for Edward Said, as Lazarus puts it, the “orient [...] emerges as an effect of Orientalist discourse [...] having obscured if not obliterated the earlier reality” (11). In light of this viewpoint, literature which seeks to (re)imagine or (re)invent socio-cultural geographies that have long been subject to imperialist symbolic power may be understood as challenging constellations of opaque and inaccessible non-worlds so to speak, in order to bring other realities back from non-world oblivion. Stuart Hall has called for greater linkage in critical theory between
“the post-colonial and the analysis of the new developments in global capitalism” (257), so as to avoid “a failure of theorisation” (258). My thesis, which has argued that the inaccessibility of a legal institution is thematically tied up with the problematic of internationalisation in Dickens’ writing, has in part sought to uncover how literary works may be approached, with Jameson, as “distorted expressions” of globalisation.

In conclusion, this study has established the non-world heuristic’s function in *Bleak House*. The non-world may evidently be theorised further, not least by way of an in depth consideration of negative accessibility from the vantage point of possible-worlds theory. Crucially, the major thinkers of inaccessibility presented in this essay—Dickens, Bourdieu and Jameson—share a resolve, and indeed a capacity, to make the inaccessible accessible. The non-world heuristic of *Bleak House* serves to generate an awareness of a socially restricting inaccessibility but is far from defeatist—indeed, as David Harvey suggests, “power in the realms of representation may end up being as important as power over the materiality of spatial organisation itself” (*Condition* 233). Here I bring my case for the non-world heuristic to a close, hopefully having provided a degree of access to the role of inaccessibility in *Bleak House*. 
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Works Cited


