AUTHOR-NETWORK:
CITY PLAYS, DRAMATIC AUTHORSHIP, AND OTHER EARLY MODERN ASSEMBLAGES

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John Robert Ladd, B.A.

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John Robert Ladd, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Lena Cowen Orlin, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Previous approaches to networks and collaboration in early modern drama deal with either "in-text" networks of representation or "around-text" networks of print culture. My approach will be to discuss both an around-text network, authorship, and an in-text network, the representations of cities. By using Latour's actor-network theory, I will propose that the relationship between the two networks is reciprocal: early modern authorship and representations of London affected one another and developed simultaneously, together constituting a larger network that I hope to describe through close analysis of particular texts. Representations of London in the city plays will be subject to the same actor-network analysis as authorship, and four particular plays, Sir Thomas More, The Roaring Girl, Eastward Ho, and Bartholomew Fair, will guide me through a discussion of how both networks affected and are affected by one another while generating increased mobility in the areas of class, gender, and authority. By thinking about cities and their representations as intrinsically and reciprocally related to authorship, the process-centered concept of the actor-network can bring us closer to an understanding of early modern cities as authored, and of an authorship that resembles a city-network. It’s my contention that this framing of both networks will be closer to our present-day experience of both cities and authors.
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Introduction: Pointing Fingers

“A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute a book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations.”

Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus

In the Fall of 1605, Ben Jonson and George Chapman were jailed shortly following the publication of Eastward Ho, a play they’d written in collaboration with John Marston. While Marston escaped arrest, Jonson and Chapman were held accountable for lines that made fun of Scots and which had insulted King James. Jonson and Chapman were freed in November, with the help of the Earl of Suffolk, by claiming that it was Marston, and not them, who had written the offending lines (Van Fossen 4-7).

Whether it was the publication of the play or a particular performance that led to the authors’ imprisonment remains unclear, but what is clear is that only the authors were blamed for the offensive passages. The Children of Her Majesties Revels, the company that performed the play, was not implicated, nor was the publisher, William Aspley. Those in charge of the production at the Blackfriars were left unscathed, and so were the printers and copyists responsible for creating the book. The Stationer’s Company wasn’t indicted for licensing play, the theater wasn’t shut down, and the printing press with which the book was made was left in operation. Only the authors were sought out and thrown in prison, and while there were numerous places to which blame could have been passed, they pointed their fingers at the only other author whose name appeared on the title page.

Many have argued for the collaborative and deeply participatory authorships of the early modern period, but we often insist on recognizing only the agency of authors, despite our
knowledge of these collaborative systems. The *Eastward Ho* episode, for example, is often cited as a demonstration of the perceived threat that playwrights posed to public affairs. What’s never mentioned is that their imprisonment willfully ignored the other participants in the making of the play. Discussion of this historical moment, and of who was *really* responsible for writing the offending lines, overshadows other readings of the scene which might have more resonance not only with the play as a whole, but with the surrounding conditions of the play’s creation.

The early modern period is a time of important transitions in the way we think about authors. As is evident above, even in the earliest part of the 17th century authorship as a concept already had a strong foothold. But the complex system that produced plays on both the stage and the page was perhaps at its height in this period, and many traces of this system show up not only in various historical records but in the plays themselves. Rather than viewing collaboration and singular authorship as different “modes” that existed simultaneously or in competition in this period, as Jeffrey Masten and Lukas Erne do, an actor-network analysis of authorship will show that early modern dramatic authorship is instead a concatenation of variously grouped collective forces. For Latour, “an actor-network is what is made to act by a large star-shaped web of mediators flowing in and out of it. It is made to exist by its many ties: attachments are first, actors are second” (217). Conventional approaches to authorship, even those that recognize collaborative forces, are beholden to the same way of thinking that caused Jonson and Chapman to be jailed: they recognize actors (authors) at the expense of connections. My intention here is to use actor-network theory to highlight attachments rather than actors, and in doing so to configure an approach to textual criticism that thinks around authorship.
How is textual interpretation possible in the absence of a firm concept of authorship? Or, in Masten’s formulation, “How will we read, interpret, conceptualize, organize, and edit texts written before the birth of the author in its modern... incarnation?” (9). I will argue that the representations of the city in the plays I’ve chosen to discuss, itself an in-text network, is the “trace left behind” of the around-text authorship network. By examining the way these two networks interact reciprocally, with all their accompanying translations and distortions, I hope to develop an interpretive lens for these collectively-produced plays that’s based on place and action rather than on person. Central to this is Latour’s idea of sociology of translation, in which group formation is highlighted as actions are translated through various mediators. I will show these mediators at work in the plays, engaged in acts of translation as they constitute and construct a shared city-space.

A major focus of this study will be on the way a city-space interacts with the networks of a text both inside and out. Seventeenth-century London is the nexus for the creation of the various play-texts I hope to discuss: it is the situation in which the texts are written as well as the setting of the plays themselves. In Theater of a City, Jean Howard writes, “As represented on the stage, the places of London thus become a powerful resource in complex and socially significant renditions of urban life. Place, then, functions in these dramas as the material arena within which urban social relations were regulated and urban problems negotiated” (3). For Howard and many other critics, place in general and London in particular is integral to the function of not only city comedy but the entire process of writing, performing, printing, and publishing. I seek to illuminate this discussion of place by building an actor-network account of early modern
London, one that respects the attachments, connections, and varied relations that made up this influential city-space that appears both within and without the plays.

Networks have recently been both a useful and popular way of describing both cities and systems of playmaking. Leah Marcus invokes networks to talk about the creation of printed documents in a way that contrasts with the hegemony of the single author/single text paradigm in the New Bibliography; Joseph Ward’s *Metropolitan Communities* describes the inner workings of London in a networked way, and more recently Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington have explicitly named networks as a useful way of thinking about early modern communities. Each of these descriptions are of what Latour would call “technical networks,” the traditional analogy drawn in comparison to computer networks of a collection of “nodes” attached to each other in various one-to-one relationships. An actor-network takes this idea a step further: within *acts* of attachment, mediation, translation actor-networks are present. Where a technical network is a static description, an actor-network is dynamic. For Latour, “a network is not made of nylon thread, words or any durable substance but is the trace left behind by some moving agent. You can hang your fish nets to dry but you can’t hang an actor-network: it has to be traced anew by the passage of another vehicle, another circulating entity” (132). In my formulation, the moving agent, the circulating entity out of which the actor-network arises, is the play-text. The trace left behind is the physical book. This is markedly different from previous models that envision the network as static systems through which various plays pass. In an actor-network model, each system is as unique and dynamic as the particular playbook itself.

Actor-network theory allows us to think about the networks that create a play in collusion with the networks that appear within plays. The relationship between form and content is
strengthened, as content becomes the “trace left behind” of the form. Latour stresses that physical objects are crucial actors, with the same agency as people, and the presence of objects is strong in both the in-text and around-text networks. In the fictional London of the city comedies, objects, institutions, places, and people are translated equally as actors in the plot’s network. In the historical London, objects like the printing press, institutions like the King’s Men, places like St. Paul’s Churchyard, and people like Ben Jonson are likewise equally mediated and translated in Latour’s sense. If the various actors inside and outside of the text are so variegated and far-reaching, how can we point fingers at authors alone?

It may be more useful to think about “authors” as analogous to an actor (as in actor-network), and to dramatically broaden our definition of the actants that take part in the author function. In the chapters that follow, I will attempt to trace what such an author-network might look like.

The first chapter will cover what I’ve labeled the “around-text” network: the associations and translations that create a play on the stage, on the page, or both. As I said above, every network is unique and can only be traced through its material specificity. This is a difficult thing to do from a distance of 400 years, and so I’ll be using the particular examples of three plays: Eastward Ho, The Roaring Girl, and Sir Thomas More. Each of these plays had a strikingly different performance and print history, and they all provide compelling evidence that the forces at play in author-networks are multivalent. All three plays are collaborative in the sense that they are attributed to more than one writer, but an actor-network approach to the text should significantly broaden the notion of collaboration to include the objects, institutions, and places that acted in concert to produce the various play-texts in question.
Following this discussion of the material conditions of play-making, I’ll use the same theoretical lens to discuss the content of the plays. Again, each play performs a different exploration of the networked forces of London. Two are recognized as belonging to the genre of city comedy, and the third, *Sir Thomas More*, deals with city life in a less comedic but equally important way. I will be focusing on representations of London in this section, but some discussion of the operations of historical London will be necessary to show the ways that the plays both adhere to and depart from their contemporary situatedness. By showing that each of these plays depicts London as an actor-network, I hope to suggest a larger claim about the way early modern drama consistently evokes networks in its imagery and representations of city-space.

The third and final section of this thesis will closely examine a single play, Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*. This rich, complex play has a lot to offer an actor-network analysis. I’ve chosen it for two reasons. First, it’s not a “collaborative” play in the traditional sense; it was included in Jonson’s folio, and he claimed sole authorship over it. I hope to show that this claim of authorship doesn’t preclude a networked understanding of how the text was created. Second, the play deals with many typical London forces, but it doesn’t take place within the city specifically. The content side of a city-influenced actor-network doesn’t have to include an overt representation of the city; in this case the fair stands in for the city. My attempt in this section will be to show that this method of analysis extends beyond collaborative city comedies to more “traditional” plays of the period and that an actor-network approach to texts of this kind can yield new interpretations. By tracing the translations and connections present in *Bartholomew Fair*, I will argue that the society depicted in the text is predicated on misunderstanding and
miscommunication not as an aberrant, inverted, unfortunate situation but as a normal and even preferred state of affairs. The progress of the plot is facilitated by miscommunication rather than blocked by it, and it’s an actor-network analysis that will reveal this attribute of the play.

To conclude this study I’ll offer some comments on how actor-network theory can be used for further research, and I’ll reflect on why networks are a useful and compelling model for early modern scholarship in the digital age. In the pages that follow, my hope is to provide sufficient evidence to make those reflections worthwhile.
Chapter 1: Print, Performance, and the Dramatic Actor-Network

In our discussion of networks, the logical place to begin is the portion of this study in which networks are most often invoked. The past 30 or so years has seen a dramatic increase in interest and debate over the way play-texts are produced on both the stage and the page. Scholars of this new “history of the book” have struggled to find ways to map the complex process that produced books in and around Renaissance London. Robert Darnton’s communications circuit model, for example, has become standard reading for students of book history, and it will serve as our starting point as well:

One of the great things about this model is that it raises more questions than it answers, and thus serves as a rich text for the beginning of any discussion about how books are created. Does the cycle start with the author, or can it begin at any point? Why are “author” and “publisher” singular? Why do shippers receive their own category, while libraries are grouped under readers?
Why do binders appear twice? What does it mean to say “etc.”? And what in the world is going on in the chart’s center?

I’m not the first person to point out this model’s shortcomings. In a field that is supposedly centered on the book, the model is almost exclusively people-centered. Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker, in “A New Model for the Study of the Book”, have the same problem with Darnton’s concern for individuals over the book itself. They’ve devised a book-centered model that doesn’t so much reorganize Darnton’s model as turn it inside-out:

Ironically, in this book-centered model the book doesn’t at all appear. Instead, there are various processes influenced by the same social forces that appeared at the center of Darnton’s model. This model may be more intellectually satisfying, but by not including any people or objects it
avoids the central question on the minds of many: If not the author alone, who or what created all these books?

At about this point in the ongoing scholarly discussion, networks enter the debate. They provide an antidote to a circular or cyclical model by allowing all the forces of playmaking to be connected, but in a nonsequential, interchangeable way. Networks also provide a way to include the process of performance as well as print: networks allow for multiple effects as well as causes. I don’t seek to upturn or contradict much of the good work on networks that’s already been done by Leah Marcus, Jeffrey Masten, and others. Instead I hope to build on it by adding Latour’s actor-network theory. Rather than superimposing any model over the system of playmaking, actor-network theory allows a model to emerge out of the material conditions of playmaking in the period. Here’s what Latour has to say about technical networks as models, and about their relationships to actor-networks:

At first, the graph representation of networks, seen as star-like embranchments out of which lines leave to connect other points that have nothing but new connections, provided a rough but faithful equivalent to those associations. It had the advantage of defining specificity not by any substantial content, but by a list of associations: the more connected, the more individualized a point was. But those visual graphs have the drawback of not capturing movements and of being visually poor. Yet even those limits have their advantage since the very poverty of graphical representation allows the inquirer not to confuse his or her infra-language with the rich objects that are being depicted: the map is not the territory. At least there is no risk of believing that the world itself is
made of points and lines, while social scientists too often seem to believe that the world is made of social groups, societies, cultures, rules, or whatever graphic displays they have devised to make sense of their data. (132-133)

Technical networks as models are not perfect, but they are at the very least not unnecessarily confusing. Actor-networks require us to understand systems as the “trace left behind by some moving agent,” and this understanding is very difficult to model. Rather than focusing on models first and trying to build an understanding of specifics, Latour’s theory requires that we begin with the specific conditions of authorship and all its muddled collaborations.

Part of the problem is that we think of authorship as a social process, as evidenced by the prominence of the term “socioeconomic conjuncture” in both of the above diagrams. For Latour, and indeed for most people, terms like social and socioeconomic don’t carry any significant meaning; they don’t tell us anything more about the way authorship works. Latour explains,

For instance, fishermen, oceanographers, satellites, and scallops might have some relations with one another, relations of such a sort that they make others do unexpected things--this is the definition of a mediator, as we have now seen several times. Is there one element in this concatenation that can be designated as ‘social’? No. Neither the functioning of satellites nor the life habits of scallops would be clarified in any way by adding something social to the description. The social of sociologists thus appears exactly as it always was, namely a superfluous, a purely redundant rear-world adding nothing to the real world except artificial conundrums--just like the ether before relativity theory
helped physicists to re-describe dynamics. Stage one: the social has vanished.

(106-107)

In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour proposes that this empty kind of social be replaced by a “reassembled” social made up by refusing to rely on static models and stubbornly adhering to the relations of the actors themselves. This means including things, objects, institutions, places, etc., that have no place in more traditional “socioeconomic” models. Including either only people or only abstract processes doesn’t really give us a sense of the associations that create plays on the stage and page. This is why even the most innovative thinkers in this space, including Lukas Erne, Jeffrey Masten, and Leah Marcus, still tend to revert to the agencies of particular people (be they authors, publishers, printers, or what have you) rather than including the broader agencies at play. For example, here’s Masten’s brief outline of his model from *Textual Intercourse*: “The construction of meaning by a theatrical company was polyvocal—often beginning with a collaborative manuscript, which was then revised, cut, rearranged, and augmented by book-holders, copyists, and other writers, elaborated and improvised by music and songs that may or may not have originated in a completely different context” (14). What Masten leaves out is that the necessity of many of these revisions, cuts, rearrangements, and augmentations was caused by the material conditions of the play’s making. The objects surrounding this process (the location of the playhouse, the kind of type used to print it, the costumes, the sets, etc.) had their own agency in the play’s creation and were equally responsible for these various determinations.

However, as Latour would be quick to point out, we’ll never get anywhere by speaking about the process in generalities. It’s best to discuss the process at large by getting specific about
particular plays. What I want to do in the next several pages is point out collaborative, networked
elements of these plays that come from sources outside the traditional models of play-making
“circuits.” Let’s begin with *Eastward Ho*. The performance and print history of this play are
relatively straightforward in comparison to others. I have already mentioned the potentialities of
censorship surrounding the text, and I want to get back to that a little later on. One of the main
features of the text that’s readily apparent when reading through is the play’s consistent use of
parody. These parodies, usually of other plays or books of the period, aren’t an aberration;
they’re intrinsic to the plot and important to carrying forward the lives of the characters and
events of the play.

The play’s Prologue distinctly takes note that the play is a response to *Westward Ho*,
another Renaissance drama written a few years previously: “

Not out of envy, for there’s no effect
Where there’s no cause; nor out of imitation,
For we have evermore been imitated;
Nor out of our contention to do better
Than that which is opposed to ours in title,
For that was good, and better cannot be” (lines 1-6)

These lines acknowledge the play as a response to *Westward Ho* without reducing it to a simple
jealous or competitive imitation. There is present here the notion that *Eastward Ho* is
participating in a conversation with this and other plays. And the myriad influences of this work
are alluded to in the final lines of the Prologue: “Nor is our title utterly enforced, / As by the
points we touch at you shall see. / Bear with our willing pains, if dull or witty; / We only
dedicate it to the City” (lines 11-4). The last line of the dedication can be read not only as a nod to the setting of the play and its audience but also as a recognition that the City itself and all its playwrights have worked in concert here.

Embarking from this point, the play gleefully quotes, references, and parodies other plays through all five of its acts. In fact, there are so many references that several remain unidentified: the sources of the quotations, once readily apparent to Jacobean audiences, are lost to a contemporary ear. However, many references are still quite recognizable. Take, for example, Quicksilver’s direct quote from Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* when he cries, “Eastward Ho! ‘Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia’” (2.1.97-8), or his extended recitation, just a few lines after the Marlowe reference, of a speech from Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* (2.1.144-57). There is also Security’s familiar parody of perhaps the most famous lines from Shakespeare’s *Richard III*: “A boat, a boat, a boat, a full hundred marks for a boat!” (3.4.5-6). One imagines these references to be quite popular with an early modern audience, and they are a major source of Van Fossen’s assertion in the introduction to our edition of the play that “[m]uch of the wit and originality results from the play’s saturation with allusions to contemporary interests, customs, and events” (16-7).

In number and humor, the most significant references that occur in *Eastward Ho* are from *Hamlet*, a play that we can assume to have achieved some fame at this point (or at least it had become recognizable enough to be parodied). The character of Gertrude herself is the most prominent reference to the play, but there are other notable allusions. Among them are Gertrude’s melodramatic parody of Ophelia’s song (2.2.85-9) and the brief appearance of the excitable footman, Hamlet, who at one point is asked, “Hamlet, are you mad?” (3.2.7). All of
these direct references serve to underscore Van Fossen’s more general point that “it is probably not going too far to say that the play owes its vehicle, its basic shape, and its most prominent themes to currents evident in the work of earlier and contemporary playwrights that in turn reflect currents in the society for which they were written” (14).

And Masten also asserts that this direct borrowing of material was not uncommon to early modern playwriting: “The construction of meaning by a theatrical company was polyvocal-often beginning with a collaborative manuscript, which was then revised, cut, rearranged, and augmented by book-holders, copyists, and other writers, elaborated and improvised by music and songs that may or may not have originated in a completely different context” (14). But the writers of *Eastward Ho* (however many of them there were) are particularly explicit about this polyvocal nature of their work. The characters in the play participate in and reinforce notions of collaborative borrowing. Touchstone’s familiar refrain, imploring himself, the other characters, and the audience to “work upon that now,” almost seems to refer to the constant working and reworking of other texts in the play (1.2.199). There are several self-referential metatheatrical moments, including that in which Touchstone expresses his hope that the person of Golding will be immortalized in the theater along with “the Lady Ramsey and grave Gresham” (4.2.80-9). Not only does the world of the play posit that any moment can be written about, but it shows that those written moments will necessarily refer to and converse with previous writings.

This is no more evident than in the culmination of the plot. Quicksilver, in order to convince Touchstone to drop the charges against him and his compatriots, recites an elaborate parody of an existing ballad, “Mannington’s” (5.5.45-130). That the resolution of the play’s conflict can only be achieved by an act of parody is hardly surprising given its collaborative
trajectory. And indeed Touchstone seems to be validating much more than Quicksilver’s recitation when he says, “Speak no more; all former passages are forgotten, and here my word shall release you” (5.5.144-5).

This last parodied exchange between Touchstone and Quicksilver marks their centrality to the play’s collaborative nature. Many of the cross-textual references are in Quicksilver’s voice, and Touchstone can hardly speak without uttering a proverb. A typical section of his dialogue is the following: “with good wholesome thrifty sentences—as, ‘Touchstone, keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee’; ‘Light gains makes heavy purses’; ‘‘Tis good to be merry and wise’” (1.1.57-60). In light of collaboration, Van Fossen’s observation rings true that the proverbs “are, in their folksiness, their didacticism, and their touch of cliché, one of the stylistic features that contribute heavily to the total effect of the play” (13). The proverbs are an additional culture-wide collaborative input to the play’s text; in his regular speech, Touchstone quotes any common, everyday speaker.

Aside from its distinction as a collaborative work, Eastward Ho is also famous for its involvement with the censorship of the time, and censorship also constitutes a sort of collaboration. Janet Clare says of Marston’s work that “it can be seen how the texts themselves serve to comment upon as well as exemplify the practice of censorship” (194). With this particular text in mind, we should note Clare’s assertion that “the integrity of the text was not preserved in printing” (207). The censors had a significant impact on the play as it has reached modern readers. Eastward Ho is a vibrant example of Masten’s idea that “censorship—in Annabel Patterson’s extended sense, an activity that both silences discourses and generates others—is a further participant in the production of theatrical meaning in this period” (15).
*Eastward Ho* can be viewed largely as an exercise in bringing together multiple sources to produce an entirely new play. This sort of borrowing is a manifestation of the networked creation of plays. Latour describes actor-network theory as the sociology of translation, and these moments in *Eastward Ho* are translated instances of one text acting on another. Borrowing cannot be accounted for as a simple influence on an author; to be true to actor-network theory we must look past the abstract idea of influence and identify the particular objects and people that act. As Latour explains, “This is exactly what the words ‘actor’ and ‘person’ mean: no one knows how many people are simultaneously at work in any given individual; conversely, no one knows how much individuality there can be in a cloud of statistical data points” (54). The play affords us the rare ability to witness firsthand the multiple books simultaneously at work in this single book.

*The Roaring Girl* displays a different element of this collaborative, networked phenomenon. From the text of the play itself, as well as records from its performance, we know that Mary Frith, the cross-dressing London figure on whom the play is based, performed on the same stage immediately after the play. This additional collaboration expands our idea of “influence,” as it’s difficult to determine which performance is influencing the other. Gustav Ungerer provides some additional background information on Mary Frith’s performance:

Mary Frith was fully aware of the crucial importance of her solo performance in one of the leading commercial theaters. Endowed with an inborn talent for playing up to street and tavern audiences, she performed with great aplomb. She seized the opportunity to bring home to the audience that her self-fashioned cultural identity as a public persona, that is, as a female entertainer in
male disguise, was not identical with her private self. Thus, she let it be known in
unmistakable words that she was not a transvestite, nor a hermaphrodite, nor a
sexually ambiguous character of any kind. She addressed the audience of the
Fortune Theatre, some 2,340 spectators, telling them unashamedly and
disarmingly ‘that she thought that many of them were of opinion that she was a
man, but if any of them would come to her lodging, they should finde that she is a
woman.’ This declaration was classified by the ecclesiastical judges as ‘immodest
&lascivious speaches’ that she ‘also used at that time.’ There was, however,
nothing lascivious about the reaffirmation of her womanhood. Her disclosure may
also have been meant as a rejection of Middleton and Dekker's fictional
representation of her as a hermaphroditic ideal. (24)

By engaging in collaborative performance-making with Middleton, Dekker, and those producing
and performing The Roaring Girl, Frith restructures the notion of a simple influencing figure and
actively engages in play-making outside of the traditional bounds of a communications circuit.

The Roaring Girl engages with this networked element through its treatment of the
carer character Moll Cutpurse, as the play leads to Mary Frith’s performance. Moll, as we will see
more closely in the next chapter, is identified with the play’s characterization of London, but
she’s also associated with performance and fame. Here’s our introduction to Moll in the play’s
Prologue: “Both these are suburb-roarers. Then there’s besides / A civil, city-roaring girl, whose
pride, / Feasting, and riding, shakes her husband’s state, / And leaves him roaring through an iron
grate” (lines 21-4). It is delightfully unclear here whether the speaker is referring to Moll or
Mary Frith, an obscurity that will be further exploited later on. Frith’s notoriety is often brought
to the fore as a way of affording Moll power. She is validated by Sebastian: “There’s a wench / Called Moll, Mad Moll, or Merry Moll, a creature / So strange in quality, a whole city takes / Note of her name and person” (1.1.98-101). This is all leading up to Mary Frith and the playhouse’s mutual exploitation of one another’s fame at the end of the performance. Fame was a source of power for both groups and Ungerer claims that Frith had a specific message for the public she intended to transmit through her presence: “Mary Frith's message, then, was that the crossing of gender boundaries was not transgressive and disruptive, nor immoral and reprehensible, and hence was not punishable” (25). By seeking to advance a particular point of view, Frith takes part in performing the author-function for this text.

In turn the text continually reinforces her performative power: by Laxton she’s explicitly called as large in spirit as the city itself: “Life, sh’has the spirit of four great parishes, and a voice that will drown all the city!” (2.1.188-9). Throughout the play, various incidents serve as almost an advertisement for Frith’s presence, including Moll’s interest in a variety of entertainment skills including swordsmanship and music. Frith’s stage persona is an integral part of the play’s construction.

Moll’s surname, Cutpurse, is of equal importance to understanding Frith’s presence. Ungerer points out that the presence of Frith’s gender transgression may not have been an issue for local authorities were it not for her ability to draw many additional cutpurses to the theater, creating an increased threat to the public order (28). The presence of cutpurses at the play, including the presence of Frith herself, is the subject of a warning the character Moll issues to the audience: “I have sat amongst such adders, seen their stings -- / As any here might -- and in full playhouses / Watched their quick-diving hands, to bring to shame / Such rogues, and in that
stream met an ill name” (5.1.318-21). With these lines, the audience suddenly becomes aware that their purses are at risk of being cut, and that they are part of the networked “stream” that Moll has been describing throughout the play. Moll additionally calls up the possibility of her prosecution and execution, a subject that was a very real danger for Mary Frith: “Condemn me? Throth an you should, sir, / I’d make you seek out one to hang in my room: / I’d give you the slip at gallows and cozen the people” (5.2.209-11). Moll doesn’t fear the laws of gentlemen: though they could legally find something for which to condemn her, legal censure or even death could not affect either her fame or her transgression. Frith’s presence as part of the production challenges our idea of the role of source material. She embodies the source of the play and engages in critical, networked collaboration with both the play’s performance and the book which has been passed down.

Latour makes a distinction in his theory between mediators and intermediaries. The idea that there are social intermediaries through which information is transmitted without being changed is an illusion for Latour, and all intermediaries, like the idea of source material in relation to this play, are actually mediators which transmit and translate the information they carry. No “piece” of source material exhibits this potentiality more clearly than Mary Frith does for The Roaring Girl.

Sir Thomas More, a play manuscript for which there is no evidence of either a printed edition or a performance, allows us to think about material elements of play-making networks that exist outside the circuits of either print or performance. Circulating manuscripts of plays that may never have reached the stage or the page represent an earlier, underevolved part of the “cycle” for many print culture scholars. As such, much of the scholarship around Sir Thomas
More has been focused on the question of authorship by trying to identify the various handwritings in the manuscript. A particularly large amount of attention has been spent on trying to discover whether or not Shakespeare had anything to do with the writing of the play. From an actor-network perspective, manuscripts have many more interesting things to tell us about play-making than simply which writers were “responsible” for their creation.

Jason Scott-Warren has done helpful work tracing manuscript networks. He says of these particularly malleable texts, “Early modern texts were objects, circulating alongside things as solid as medical ingredients and as apparently tangible as the reputation of a courtier or the name of a marriageable woman” (31). Thinking about a manuscript as an object gives the circulating text itself agency in the actor-network. For Scott-Warren, “when a text moved between two communities in a network... it was contested, adapted and reappropriated” (27). This matches Latour’s ideas about mediation and translation:

Instead of simply transporting effects without transforming them, each of the points in the text may become a bifurcation, an event, or the origin of a new translation. As soon as actors are treated not as intermediaries but as mediators, they render the movement of the social visible to the reader. Thus, through many textual inventions, the social may become again a circulating entity that is no longer composed of the stale assemblage of what passed earlier as being part of society. (128-9)

Manuscripts, as they operate in Scott-Warren’s formulation, perform the same task as one of Latour’s mediators. This manuscript-as-mediator function is extended when the circulating manuscript is shared and copied: “Reading and writing here converge: to own a text, you sharpen
your pen, mix your ink, and start to copy” (Scott-Warren 18). Note here the importance of material objects to the process of transmission. Even Edmund Tilney, the Master of the Revels who made comments and changes to *Sir Thomas More* and likely made the eventual decision to censor it, participated in this process of appropriation, transmission, translation, and collaboration (Gabrieli 17). It’s through the simple existence and survival of *Sir Thomas More* and other plays that exist only in manuscript that we can see how manuscript networks were not a less complex, separate process from performance or print, but a full-fledged part of the actor-network of playwriting.

By thinking about manuscript practice in this more networked way, we can begin to make connections between these practices and other actors in the play-making process. Consider the practice of keeping errata lists, which until recently was not closely examined by critics. Ann Blair gives a great overview this practice with respect to newly-printed texts:

> In making corrections in the books that they owned, with or without the guidance of printed errata lists, readers acted beyond the control of authors and printers and played an active role in shaping the final version of the text for themselves and others to whom their annotated copies may have circulated. … The signs of correction left in many early modern books, from variations in the printed text to errata lists and manuscript changes, highlight the collective nature of book production, which involved authors and printers, but also less visible players such as correctors and readers. (41)

Errata lists elevate readers to the same intermediary status of play-making nodes that we have seen bestowed upon audiences at live performances. For Seth Lerer, “the errata sheet stands
not as a static marker of uncaught mistakes but as a place holder in the ongoing narratives of book making and book reading themselves” (42). I would assert that these ongoing narratives extend back beyond merely book making into the process of play-making. If we think in terms of Scott-Warren’s point about transferring and transmuting text, errata lists become an extension of a practice that begins with manuscripts. Indeed, what some of the hands in Sir Thomas More seem to be performing is the part of an editor or corrector, and had the book gone to print that process would’ve been carried on by people who would otherwise fall into the simple category of “reader.” Despite so much focus given to the generation of printed texts from playbooks, from an actor-network perspective these analyses are no more important than observations about the manuscript states of many playbooks.

What I’ve attempted to do in this chapter is identify ways in which the construction of these three plays highlights particular moments of mediation and translation that would be dismissed by traditional analyses of communications circuits or networks as outside of the process. Instead, using actor-network theory, we can think about these things as inside the process. In Eastward Ho, it was parody and intertextual influence; in The Roaring Girl it was the performance of Mary Frith; in Sir Thomas More it was manuscript networks and corrective practice. We’ve added more attachments, more influences, in line with Latour’s insights: “While in the old paradigm you had to have a zero-sum game--everything lost by the work of art was gained by the social, everything lost by the social had to be gained by the ‘inner quality’ of the work of art--in the new paradigm you are allowed a win/win situation: the more attachments the better... Who would be silly enough to deduct from the total sum of action the influence of pointing something out? The more influence, the better” (237). This is a natural extension from
the insights of previous critics of playmaking, like Margaret Aston, who says: “Speaking and singing, reading, writing and reciting, looking at texts on walls and in books, half hearing, half understanding, rereading and rewriting, set the scripts and books of the seventeenth century, like those of the fourteenth, in multi-layered communications of eyes and ears. Drawing dividing lines seems as difficult as drawing a perfect circle” (289). Actor-network theory provides a useful framework for thinking through these multi-layered communications that previous scholars have grappled with, and as we’ll see in subsequent chapters, it’s an equally useful framework for thinking about the way London operates in the plays, as well as for re-thinking textual interpretation.
Chapter 2: London (Re)calling, or Topography, Cities, and Representational Networks

“A man in the course of this world should be like a surgeon’s instrument, work in the wounds of others, and feel nothing himself. The sharper and subtler the better.”

Sir Petronel in Eastward Ho (3.2.216-9)

That actor-network theory can help us to understand the complexities of play-making is not all that surprising or useful on its own. In addition to the insights gained in the previous chapter, I’d like to show that actor-network theory can assist in answering questions asked by literary studies: questions about character, plot, and setting. In the plays we’ve been discussing, London is the shared setting, the site for all action and the background through which the audience can relate. Recent scholarship around London has emphasized its importance both as the milieu in which plays were created and the important representational setting that helped to instantiate a play’s characters and plot. Of city plays, Jean Howard claims, “The recurring features of plot and character that structure these stories, and the changes rung on them over time, are crucial evidence of both the social tensions these plays helped to negotiate and the terms in which they made city space socially legible” (3). The phrase “socially legible” provides an interesting start for thinking about the way London operated in the plays as a representational actor-network. Latour’s claim that “novels, plays, and films from classical tragedy to comics provide a vast playground to rehearse accounts of what makes us act” underscores the importance of thinking about how actor-networks show up in our representations, and how they affect our thinking about the social (54-5). London in the plays we’ll discuss is an actor-network that mirrors the play-making network discussed in the previous chapter, and this actor-network London represents a significant shift in thinking about city-space for both 17th-century audiences and 21st-century scholars.
Before we can talk about the way London shows up in these plays representationally, we must take a moment to discuss the historical London of the early seventeenth century. In scholarship about London, we’re currently reaching a point where it’s easier to talk about networks than ever before. London’s always been of interest to students of early modern play-making, but in the past half century, the concern with London as a dynamic community has taken off. Much of my discussion of London is indebted to the work of Steve Rappaport and Joseph Ward. Rappaport’s *Worlds within Worlds* posits a London that is not simply transitioning from medieval to modern, and that is not full of constant turmoil. Through tireless, exhaustive research of 16th- and 17th-century London life, Rappaport helps us to think about a structured, relatively stable London in which both large and small institutions are important: “We label London society early modern or pre-industrial and we search, at times too hard, for signs of change, perhaps overlooking evidence which points to continuity” (375). Latour often warns against overlooking evidence that doesn’t fit with our presuppositions, and Rappaport’s research is a good example of not succumbing to this temptation.

Rappaport’s work (as we move ahead in the network of London scholarship) paved the way for Ward’s study of the supposed dichotomy between the orderly City and the surrounding metropolitan suburbs in *Metropolitan Communities*. Ward challenges traditional assumptions about the differences between the smaller, political entity of the City, with its hierarchical government and trade guilds, and the growing suburbs, in which the new free market was supposedly a little more free. By treating the City and the suburbs (both of which, it should be noted, are part of London as we think about it today) as a single metropolitan entity with interlocking parts, Ward is able to describe London as a more complex system than the one in the
This kind of thinking opens up the study of London as a network. Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington talk about the correlation between networks and physical space in the context of London: “The techniques of network analysis provide an alternative and complementary way of assessing social grouping and association: of correlating the skeletal, connective outlines of community across space as well as the imperatives of proximity and residence within place” (7-8). Scholars are very aware of the way networks, and by extension actor-networks, help us to think about London historically and sociologically. But do these networked models extend to the way 16th- and 17th-century Londoners thought about their city, and therefore can they translate into the period’s literature, where our main concern is?

To answer this question, it might be helpful at this point to turn to John Stow. Stow’s *Survey of London* is regular cited not as a concrete description of the way London actually was, but as a documentation of how Stow understood the city. For our purposes, this sort of document is perfect: it allows us to conceptualize how an actual Londoner may have experienced London in the late 16th century. Stow’s main characterization of London is an appeal to the Body Politic: “This civill life approcheth nearest to the shape of that misticall body whereof Christ is the head, and men be the members” (199). Thinking about political or social entities in terms of the body is a very common analogy for early modern thinkers, and it’s something that will come up later as we discuss the plays. But the Body Politick is not totally at odds with the actor-network. Hints at this relationship are in the way Stow goes on to describe the city: “The multitude (or whole body) of this populous Citie is two ways to bee considered, generally and specially: generally,
they bee naturall Subiects... but specially considered, they consist of these three parts, Marchantes, Handicrafts men, and Labourers” (207). This relationship between the general and specific within the “body” echoes the relationship between general and specific in a network: each actor has its own agency, but the network as a whole also has agency. Likewise, Stow divides his “actors” into separate categories with their own purpose and responsibilities. Stow maps out a way of viewing London that respects both the macro and micro phenomena; by viewing the city in terms of anecdotes about individuals that interact with one another in varied ways, he establishes a view of London that’s reflected both in his writing and in plays that describe (and interact with) the city’s networks. Though early modern thinkers didn’t have the term network at their disposal, the relationships and structures they used to describe London show that they possessed a manner of networked thinking. The city plays take this a step further, including the agency of objects and institutions that is the hallmark of Latour’s formulation of the actor-network.

All three of the plays we’ve been discussing have certain civic features in common. Each deal in one way or another with the system of livery companies that determined, according to Rappaport, many features of life in early modern London. In these plays we find masters and apprentices, people plying a variety of trades, and the various authority figures of these organizations. We get a taste of how you move up or down in the livery companies, and how various companies interact with one another. Additionally, all the plays include a representation of the political and legal system of London. We’re introduced to various sheriffs, aldermen, and mayors as well as justices, scriveners, and other legal professionals. The shared milieu of these plays speaks to the way they’d establish a rapport with a London audience, and it shows that
early modern play-makers shared to some extent a vision of London as presented to the public. As Jean Howard points out, certain aspects of the city, like the Exchange and the Counter, show up time and again in plays of the period; there was a certain amount of fixation on particular features of the city, and what I hope to show is that the features of the city that were stressed underscored the networked nature of the city and communicated those to the audience. In particular, *Eastward Ho* describes the livery companies and economy of London as an actor-network, *Sir Thomas More* describes London government and its relationship to the throne in the same way, and in *The Roaring Girl* the city’s mapping of gender roles is described as an actor-network.

*Eastward Ho* presents a case of great interest to scholars like Rappaport and Ward, who are interest in the economic makeup of early modern London. It’s Howard, again, who points out that the play is particularly involved in issues of credit, payment, and the various rewards and punishments related to the city’s growing economic system: “In working out the fates of these needy debtors and greedy moneylenders, *Eastward Ho* plays extensively on the geographic motifs introduced by its antecedent and develops much more fully the various economic practices that lead to disastrous loss of credit” (99). This emphasis on the way economic practices are tied to a physical place makes the play an actor-network account. Howard has written about the Counter, one of the city’s several debtor’s prisons, but this isn’t the only economic location that the play fixates on. The title of the play refers to a captain’s cry to indicate the direction he was traveling on the Thames. The river itself, which was the source of much economic activity in London, provides the setting for a good deal of the play.
Eastward Ho is primarily interested in the social, romantic, and political ambitions of two young apprentices, and as such the play is set within a London that’s particularly attuned to the complexities of the livery companies. Quicksilver and Golding, the two apprentices, both enjoy a certain amount of social mobility in the play, to the groans and cheers (respectively) of their master, Touchstone. The three goldsmiths are all named after objects, a device not uncommon in plays of the period. Touchstone, the device of honing, creates both Quicksilver, false gold, and Golding who each show their true natures once they’re released into the world. Their names tie them not only to the actions of their profession but to the particular objects with which they make their way in the world; this gives a particular tone to their interactions that they otherwise would not have. Touchstone, in a parody of his character’s type, is constantly reciting clichéd phrases designed to shape his apprentices, such as “Prentices’ recreations are seldom with their masters’ profit” (1.1.18-9). In turn, Quicksilver finds it easy to twist the words of others to his ends, as he couches Touchstone’s statement several lines later: “Well, I am a good member of the city if I were well considered. How would merchants thrive, if gentlemen would not be unthriffs?” (1.1.36-9). This is more than characters playing to type for comedic effect. Their attachment to particular objects ties them to performing a “social” version of that object’s function, and the action of the play depends on a rather strict adherence to these roles. We can depend on Golding to be dependable; we can depend on Quicksilver to be undependable. In addition, Quicksilver’s speech about the relationship between gentlemen and merchants posits a connected, networked London in which the (apparently untoward) actions of one group unexpectedly benefit another. Not only that, but it’s in direct opposition to Touchstone’s more traditional view of a hierarchical city in which only “good”, sanctioned actions assist the larger
community and help an individual be upwardly mobile. Touchstone’s “good” daughter Mildred also attempts to uphold the standard boundaries: “I judge them truly mad that yoke citizens and courtiers, tradesmen and soldiers, a goldsmith’s daughter and a knight” (1.2.46-8). Mildred makes a leap here when she assumes that Quicksilver’s worldview (and the worldview of Sir Petronel and the other foolish characters) erases traditional boundaries: it simply recasts their actions and pays attention to new attachments. The play creates a world in which multiple ideas about the city are not only sustained, but eventually compete. That multiple characters can look at the same city and see different things mirrors the different way historians have mapped London’s social space, as summarized briefly above. As we’ll see, Quicksilver’s thesis about London seems to come out on top in the end, but not without a great deal of consternation from all sides.

We see the same networked world play out in one of the play’s several subplots. We’re introduced to the character Security, also named for a sort of object, who embodies some of the more unsavory parts of the city’s burgeoning economic activities. Security represents the writing of loans and debts, which is eventually what lands him, Quicksilver, and Sir Petronel in the Counter. His presence on stage, and his inability to see his own brand of trickery used against him, makes physical some of the more tricky attachments of Eastward Ho’s economic world. It allows the audience to take some of the unexplainable phenomena of the ups and downs of economic practice and associate those actions with a particular stage presence, and in the real world those phenomena would be associated with particular people and objects. This may explain the particular antipathy directed toward Security by the other characters.
There’s even a contrast in the way certain characters on the same ideological side seem to perceive their world. Here’s how the humble Golding describes his sudden rise to prominence:

“It hath pleased the worshipful commoners of the city to take me one i’ their number at presentation of the inquest” (4.2.45-7). Now contrast this simple, direct statement of cause and effect with Touchstone’s summary of the same event: “What a fortune was it (or rather my judgement, indeed) for me, first to see that in his disposition which a whole city so conspires to second! Ta’en into the livery of his company the first day of his freedom! Now, not a week married, chosen commoner and alderman’s deputy in a day! Note but the reward of a thrifty course. The wonder of his time!” (4.2.56-63). Rather than associating Golding’s new position with a direct causal relationship to a person or object, Touchstone describes a big social leap, and subscribes the success to either fortune or good judgment, two abstract concepts. While Golding, who actually achieves success, sees his rise as consisting of one-to-one relationships, Touchstone wants to see it in terms of big, abstract, quasi-unexplainable movements. Touchstone, however, is not the one who’s risen, and for the play to reach its conclusion, his worldview must be overturned.

Instead of condemning Quicksilver and his unfortunate companions, Golding dispenses rather even-handed justice, leaving Touchstone to wonder what the point of being in power is, after all. Touchstone wants the world to adhere to the popular model of the wheel of fortune, in which people move up and then down according to their actions. In the networked city, things happen instead according to Quicksilver’s speech earlier in the play. Even the unscrupulous actions of some groups turn out to contribute to the fortunes of others. Golding’s rapid ascendance puts him in a position to help Quicksilver, and Quicksilver landing in the Counter
allows both Golding and Touchstone to demonstrate mercy and further themselves in the community’s standing. For better or worse, the actions of one group serve another. At the end of the play, Quicksilver gains his freedom, and freedom for his friends, by performing a parody that supposedly demonstrates his repentance. We never find out if this repentance is sincere, and it doesn’t seem to matter since Quicksilver’s impression of how the city works seems to have been validated by the way the plot has unfolded. As the play ends, Quicksilver invites the audience into this networked world: “[To Touchstone] Stay, sir, I perceive the multitudes are gathered together to view our coming out at the Counter. See, if the streets and the fronts of the houses be not stuck with people, and the windows filled with ladies, as on the solemn day of the Pageant!” (Epilogue 1-6). He addresses Touchstone and by extension the rest of the characters and the whole audience, and he calls them to participate in his joy at being freed. By doing so, as he points out, they’ll mirror other events (like the Mayor’s Pageant) that celebrate the networked city.

Sir Thomas More constitutes a similar representation of the city as actor-network, but it does so by describing the government of the City and the way it interacts with the nobility and the Crown. The title character embodies the tensions between the various groups, and through him the city’s network is strengthened. The character Surrey first frames the relationship between More and London:

Now I bethink myself of Master More,

One of the sheriffs, a wise and learned gentleman,

And in especial favour with the people.

He, backed with other grave and sober men,
May by his gentle and persuasive speech  
Perhaps prevail more than we can with power.  

More is backed by both the people and the nobility, and in joining the two classes he illustrates the physical and ideological proximity that the city provides. And more obviously, as a Sheriff of London, he is a man of the city as well as a servant of the Crown. He never lets go of this relationship to London even as his rank dramatically increases: “Yet in this rising of my private blood / My studious thoughts shall tend the city’s good” (2.3.236-7).

In the pivotal scene in which More deftly deals with the rebels, it becomes clear that in certain ways he embodies and enacts the city’s will:

My lord and brethren, what I here have spoke,  
My country’s love, and next the city’s care  
Enjoined me to, which since it thus prevails  
Think God hath made weak More his instrument  
To thwart sedition’s violent intent.  

There’s an important difference between “my country’s love” and “the city’s care”. We are told, in the person of the woman that visits More in prison, that More takes the interests of the people very seriously, regardless of the low status of many of those that live in the metropolis: “Ah, gentle heart, my soul for thee is sad, / Farewell the best friend that the poor e’er had” (5.1.42-3). In his willingness to disregard class status in particular situations, More places himself in a similar position to Quicksilver: he doesn’t deny that boundaries between groups exist, but he shows that they can be transcended and translated in and through the city. He further embodies this idea with his own flexible social status: “I think I am the poorest chancellor / That ever was
in England, though I could wish, / For credit of the place, that my estate were better” (5.3.45-7).
The contradictory phrase “poorest chancellor” is a good demonstration of the blurred class lines
and social mobility that the city engenders through its network logic.

More never gives up on his London identity, despite how quickly he ascends to the
highest English office a citizen can achieve. Right up to his unfortunate end he reminds the
audience of his relationship to the city:

Good morrow, master shrieves of London, to ye both.
I thank ye that ye will vouchesafe to meet me.
I see by this you have not quite forgot
That I was in times past as you are now:
A sheriff of London. (5.4.29-33)

When More says that he “was in times past as you are now,” he warns the audience that fortune
can be unkind. But additionally, with this phrase both the sheriffs he speaks to and the audience
are made aware of More’s connection to the office of sheriff specifically and being a Londoner
in general. In short, More works to draw the other characters and the audience into the network
of London he embodies and represents.

*The Roaring Girl* presents the city as actor-network differently in that its primary
character is a woman of the city rather than a man. Moll Cutpurse is transgressive in her
appearance, speech, and actions. In that transgression she showcases aspects of the city as actor-
network that would otherwise not be apparent. As in *Eastward Ho*, the title of this play is
important to its networked representations. Roaring boys were a well-known type of civic
vagabond, generally loitering and seducing young women, but a roaring girl was a new feature of
London, embodied by an actual person, Mary Frith. The play is a way of showing how a roaring girl’s presence might act on the city, and how the city is changed by such a character’s presence. Early on (and as we saw in the previous chapter), we’re given the impression that Moll’s presence has immense power: “Life, sh’has the spirit of four great parishes, and a voice that will drown all the city” (2.1.188-9). Moll delivers on this promise, and proves herself to be larger than life in her ability to change the lives of the other characters and mete out a particular kind of transgressive justice. It’s no wonder that “there’s a wench / Called Moll, Mad Moll, or Merry Moll, a creature / So strange in quality, a whole city takes / Note of her name and person” (1.1.98-101).

Interestingly, Sir Alexander, the blocking figure, gives the most comprehensive statement about the networked city:

> Within one square a thousand heads are laid
> So close that all of heads the room seems made;
> As many faces there, filled with blithe looks,
> Show like the promising titles of new books
> Writ Merrily, the readers being their own eyes,
> Which seem to move and to give plaudities.  

(1.2.19-24)

The one square could refer to the “square mile” of the official London City limits, or it could refer more generally to the city and its surrounding suburbs. Despite the fact that Sir Alexander is describing the city in the familiar early modern terms of microcosm and macrocosm (as does Stow), we understand that sees the city as a whole made up of independently acting parts, as a network. We learn later that his view may be a little too holistic and simplistic, as he attempts to
prove that Moll’s transgressive dress points to a larger societal problem: “If the wife go in breeches, the man must wear long coats like a fool” (2.2.77-8). Sir Alexander’s overtures to the city’s interconnectedness are in service of upholding traditional social norms.

Moll, on the other hand, is able to embrace contradiction in the same way that we’ve seen Quicksilver and More do. Her transgressions of dress, speech, and action allow her to play a part in bringing Sebastian and Mary together. Rather than upturning gender roles, Moll helps a couple to fulfill those roles while continuing to reject marriage herself. This ability to embrace contradiction in the service of uniting various individuals and groups is what makes Moll such a powerful figure in the networked world of the play. As she assists Jack Dapper, she seems to transcend the normal bounds of the London justice system: “If any gentleman be in scrivener’s bands, / Send but for Moll, she’ll bail him by these hands!” (3.3.225-6). Little can stop Moll, due to her ability to defy boundaries that supposedly exist in more conservative views of London: the city in this play simply doesn’t work that way.

Attempts to stop Moll are often thwarted through the play’s networked logic. Sir Alexander hires Trapdoor, who proclaims, “A roaring boy the Roaring Girl puts down” (1.2.249). A rascal like Trapdoor seems a natural match for Moll, but she proves too clever, too strong to fall victim to the schemes of Sir Alexander and Trapdoor. Additionally, her interactions with Laxton might seem to indicate the play would end in a comedic “taming” of Moll, that she’d marry this roaring boy and renounce her transgressive ways. Though Moll turns out to be the champion of the marriage of others, especially Sebastian and Mary Fitzallard, no such resolution is needed for her. Instead, the final act of the play has Moll performing literally the
very act she’s taken up metaphorically throughout: one of translation. When a group of nobles confronts a gathering of ruffians, Moll serves as translator of their cant language:

Lord Noland: Nay, nay, Moll, why art thou angry? What was his gibberish?

Moll: Marry, this, my lord, says he: ‘Ben mort’--good wench--’shall you and I heave a booth, mill a ken, or nip a bung?’--shall you and I rob a house, or cut a purse?

All: Very good!" (5.1.194-9)

This is followed by an extended passage of parodic cant singing not unlike the ending of Eastward Ho. In the end Moll’s role is as born translator: her ability to cross boundaries of all kinds allows for the resolution of the play’s plot and helps members of different groups to communicate. Moll proves herself to be an essential part of the play’s actor-network, and her presence in the play proves the actor-network’s existence.

I’ve sketched here the ways in which these plays represent the city of London as an actor-network. By focusing on particular areas, particular groups, or even particular people, these plays show that London is networked in its economic system, in its political structures, and even in its gendered subjects. Latour explains that in order to create faithful actor-network accounts “we have to lay continuous connections leading from one local interaction to the other places, times, and agencies through which a local site is made to do something. This means that we have to follow the path indicated by the process of delegation or translation” (173). My analysis has shown that this tracing is exactly what the plays have done in their attempt to craft a representation of the city. Through Quicksilver, More, and Moll, the plays have mapped local
interactions that embrace contradiction and offer a city that is both interconnected and individualized. The London of these plays respects people, institutions, places, and objects as equal actors, and it showcases a certain level of interdependence among these mediators. This representation is not unlike Shepard and Withington’s observation about early modern communities: “Community in these instances represents not a substantive way of living so much as a process of change” (4). The plays of the period mapped this networked process of change even if they did not possess the language of Latour to explain it.

Actor-network accounts exist in city plays as a way of representing 16th- and 17th-century London. Ways the readings of central characters and places in these plays is changed if actor-network theory is used as a critical lens. I hope to take up this issue further in the next chapter, where I will attempt an extended reading of a single text, Bartholomew Fair, using actor-network theory. The networks we’ve taken a brief look at in this chapter, the various representations of London, are there because the plays were created by a networked process. Playwrights (and in using that term I mean everyone involved in the play-making network) created worlds on the stage and the page that included the same networked elements, the same kinds of mediators and attachments, that they worked with every day as they produced plays. The around-text networks were responsible for creating the in-text networks. In the next chapter, I’ll explore how this knowledge of both kinds of networks can push forward criticism of a single text.
Chapter 3: “Bring the actors along,” or *Bartholomew Fair’s Actor-Networks*

“An ‘actor’ in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it.”

*Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social*

I

*Bartholomew Fair* presents something of a puzzle to contemporary readers. While some of the characters and themes match Jonson’s earlier comedies, much of the action is loosely affiliated and without direction. There appears to be no central character, and little resolution to any of the play’s multiple plot threads. Beyond that, the play is long, too long to be realistically performed, according to Lukas Erne. It was performed at court the day after its public opening, muddling its intended audience. And it is absent from the 1616 folio of Jonson’s works without explanation. What do we make of these overlapping puzzles?

Critics have made a lot of headway finding order in the chaos, tracing patterns and pointing out hidden structures in both the play’s making and its content. But most attempts to find such patterns force the critic to ignore whatever contradictory evidence supports their claim. I intend to take up a critical project that embraces much of the chaos of *Bartholomew Fair*. The center of my project is this: Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory can be used for literary analysis. Actor-network theory takes a granular approach that embraces complexity without oversimplifying: it chooses to talk about “not... grandiose epistemological questions but about vehicles, movements, displacements, and transportation systems” (105). By focusing on what’s missing, on what’s translated between the characters of *Bartholomew Fair* rather than just what they do and what they’re made of, I hope to reassemble a critical view of the play that tackles many of its puzzles without forcing them to a neat solution.
I hope to find similarities between the creation of the play and its content, both of which are actor-network processes. I don’t want to make the mistake of eliding these two processes; as Jeffrey Masten points out, “Collaboration as practice... does not necessarily result in collaboration as theme” (58). It’s not enough to say that collaborative actor-networks exist in both places, but to use that observation as a test case for an actor-network critical approach. 

*Bartholomew Fair*’s actor-networks (both around and within the play) reveal a worldview directed by disorder, in which miscommunication and mistranslation direct action more successfully than simple understanding. In short, confusion, disorder, and chaos *drive* the story rather than block it.

To begin proving this, a brief word on Latour’s theory and how I’ll be employing it here. Most of the attention given to actor-network theory involves the agency of objects, and while material culture is important to this study it is not its primary concern. Though the associations Latour traces are not completely dependent on place, location figures heavily into actor-network theory. For Latour, places can be actors even as they’re made up of actors: “No place can be said to be bigger than any other place, but some can be said to benefit from far safer connections with many more places than others” (176). As I’ve done previously, I’ll be drawing on the play’s discussion of the Fair and London as a way of talking about place and networks. Additionally, Latour is equally interested in the associations of what other theorists would name subjects, but he in typical fashion reframes the discussion surrounding person and character:

Possession and all its synonyms are thus good words for a reworked meaning of what a ‘social puppet’ could be. The strings are still there, but they transport autonomy or enslavement depending on how they are held. From now
on, when we speak of actor we should always add the large network of attachments making it act. As to emancipation, it does not mean ‘freed from bonds’ but well-attached. (217-8)

Here my interest is in both the actor and the large network of attachments, and (as we’ll see later on) puppet is an apt term both literally and figuratively. This idea of taking on new and multivalent identities is as important to play-makers as it is to characters and performers. In Textual Intercourse, Masten is interested in the same kind of identity shift that Latour is: “A playwright im/personates another (many others) in the process of writing a play-text and thus refracts the supposed singularity of the individual in language” (17). This im/personation is a useful way for thinking about what happens to subjects, objects, and language both within and around Bartholomew Fair. This is in line with Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion about assemblage: “Collective assemblages of enunciation function directly with machinic assemblages; it is not impossible to make a radical break between regimes of signs and their objects” (7). The play rejects all sorts of “supposed singularities” as it builds its chaotic world of (sometimes indistinguishable) subjects, objects, and places.

II

Though actor-network theory hasn’t been used in this way before, there’s plenty of critical precedent for approaching Bartholomew Fair in a granular, decentered way. In terms of authorship, many recognize that the picture surrounding Jonson’s publishing persona, what Joseph Loewenstein terms the “bibliograpical ego” (1), might be more complicated than Jonson’s self-aggrandizing would have us believe.
Bartholomew Fair was first published in 1614, an important time for both the self-establishment of Jonson as author and for the idea of singular authorship. Just two years later, Jonson would publish the folio edition of his collected works, the first of its kind for a playwright. Many see the publishing of the 1616 folio as the establishment of a mode of singular authorship that replaced the collaborative system that went before. But recent critics take a more nuanced stance. For Mardock, Bartholomew Fair is evidence that Jonson himself respected a certain amount of collaborative production: “Bartholomew Fair allowed Jonson to articulate his ideal of authorship, and indeed of selfhood, not through the textualizing strategies of the Folio, but through an exploration of the authorial process involved in producing theatrical space” (97). Jonson’s attempt to construct a firm concept of singular authorship around his work is well-documented, but he did so by drawing in the elements of his surrounding author-network and assigning them a sub-level status in comparison to himself. In doing so he left a great deal of evidence that these other attachments existed. For Erne, the existence of authorship proves that playwrights were not as in control as they thought:

I argue that the first people who had a vested interest in the rise of dramatic authorship were not the playwrights themselves but the London printers, publishers, and booksellers eager to render respectable and commercially profitable what was initially an enterprise with little or no prestige. (33)

I don’t want to forget Wendy Wall’s warning that “the publisher’s control over authorial presentation, however, did not nullify the writer’s part in determining and shaping the way in which the author would later be perceived by a reading public” (115), but these critical examples
show that the picture of Jonson’s authorship is more complicated than it first appears. I want to take these ideas and complicate them further in the next section.

There’s also been considerable critical energy directed toward the issue of order and disorder in *Bartholomew Fair* and in the surrounding culture of London. It might be useful to begin with Tracey Hill’s concise statement about the city’s general complexity, that at the “level of local knowledge the inter-relationships are very complex, if not contradictory; counter-examples can always be found to complicate a simple reading of the stage-City-court nexus” (136). That being said, there are particular ways of looking at these attachments that’s helpful for both literary and historical understanding. Joseph Ward’s extended discussion of livery companies, for example, is important to both the around-text and in-text networks of *Bartholomew Fair*, and as he shows they were not the staid guardians of economic normalcy that previous historians claimed: “Livery company members... encountered the variety of illicit behaviours that contemporaries and historians have often associated with the noncitizens who lived in areas outside of the lord mayor’s control” (45). Likewise, Rappaport points out that economic conditions in the late 16th and early 17th century upset traditional notions of order: “In sixteenth-century London, however, the effects of structural, static inequality were mitigated by the presence of considerable opportunities for social mobility, avenues which allowed many Londoners to claim eventually a share of society’s wealth and power” (376). The changes in economic conditions had a similar disordering effect on the lives of women, and the traditional social boundaries between public and private, according to Laura Gowing, were upset: “There are some problematic elisions of meaning in the model of separate spheres. One of these is the confusion between public or private issues and events and public and private spaces. Public
events might take place in private spaces; women’s participation in one kind of public realm did not give them a place in others” (133).

Many of these same apparent problems, these same boundary-crossing elisions, have been identified by critics as existing in *Bartholomew Fair* specifically and Jonson’s work more generally. Mardock observes that the play “pushes to its extreme city comedy’s conceit of bringing London into the playhouse” (97). Jean Howard points out that city comedy constructs narratives “attuned to both the dominant norms and the alternative social logics possible” (112). And the play is as related to the figuration of authorship discussed above as it is to the surrounding social and economic conditions: “Quarlous, like Jonson, combines critic with playwright, writer with reader, the production of space with the practical experience of it. He is not only able to judge correctly as a spectator, but is able to reshape his world by employing this dramatic, authorial mode of space” (Mardock 106).

All of these critics have pointed in the direction of an actor-network approach to drama by describing the associations surrounding a play’s creation or the representations of disorder in a play’s London. By taking this granular approach to its natural conclusion in actor-network theory, I can show that both the creation of the text and its content are related in creating *Bartholomew Fair*’s prevailing ethic of disorder. This is not to say that there’s a necessary causal relationship between the two, and my analysis will heed Deleuze and Guattari’s warning that “the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can)” (11). The deterritorialization of the city, the book, and the play’s
world will be important as I explore how place affects both the play’s creation and its representation.

III

What can the textual history of Bartholomew Fair tell us about the associations surrounding its creation? One of the most intriguing facts about the play, as mentioned previously, is that it does not appear in the 1616 folio of Jonson’s works (nor does the more strictly collaborative Eastward Ho, for that matter). One might assume that the play stands outside Jonson’s establishment of himself as an author, but Mardock disputes this: “With Bartholomew Fair, Jonson is no less concerned with the assertion of his authority as an author than he is in the Folio project, but he is asserting it in a different arena, with the parallel strategy that by 1616 he had come to recognize to be as valid as, if not compatible with, the Folio’s textual self-enshrinement” (96). I agree with Mardock that Jonson is still interested in establishing an authorial persona with the publication of this play, but Bartholomew Fair reveals more than this desire for bibliographical ego. Lukas Erne points out that the play’s length is unrealistic from a performance perspective: “Jonson’s precise indication thus suggests that when Bartholomew Fair was acted, performances were some seventy to eighty minutes shorter than they would have been if the play had been performed in its entirety” (144). If another, shorter text of the play existed for performance purposes, as Erne suggests, Jonson at least partially acknowledges that his role as playwright was multivalent, that he produced different texts for different purposes, and that these texts were subject to change by a variety of other actors: publishers, printers, performers, audiences, etc.
For more evidence of this, it would be helpful at this point to discuss the play’s ample paratextual material. *Bartholomew Fair* was performed at court only a few days after it opened to the public. The published version includes both the “Prologue to the King’s Majesty,” intended for the court audience, as well as an “Induction on the Stage,” intended for the public audience. The printed text, by including both, highlights the multiple audiences and different associations that the play would have had in performance. While each introduction contextualizes the play differently for its different audience, both acknowledge more associations and attachments than a simple author-reader or author-audience relationship of unmediated transmission. Now, the Prologue does assert that it’s “the maker” who “doth present” the play to the King (line 11). But it sets up this author-audience binary only after welcoming the King to the Fair, presumably both in the content of the play and in the context of the performance. The particulars of the environment are enumerated, as in “such place, such men, such language, and such ware” (Prologue line 2). This could easily be a list of the elements that make up playmaking as much as those that make up the Fair.

The Induction is even more self-conscious about the collaborative effort of playmaking. Constructed as a conversation between a Stage-Keeper, Bookholder, and Scrivener, the Induction is interested in the process of group formation that surrounds a public performance or printing of a play, despite its protestations of creating a strict contractual relationship between author and audience. In fact, it takes this contract issue to the point of absurdity, and mocks it:

> Inprimus, It is covenanted and agreed, by and between the parties abovesaid, that the said spectators and hearers as well the curious and envious as the favouring and judicious, as also the grounded judgments and understandings,
do for themselves severally covenant and agree to remain in the places their money or friends have put them in, with patience, for the space of two hours and an half, and somewhat more. In which time the author promiseth to present them, by us, with a new sufficient play called *Bartholomew Fair*, merry, and as full of noise as sport, made to delight all and to offend none, provided they have either the wit or the honesty to think well of themselves. (Induction 74-86)

In a parody of legal language, the passage sets up an author-to-audience relationship only to poke holes in it. The different kinds of unsuitable audience members are listed, the curious, envious, favouring, and judicious. This complicates the “appropriate” transmission of any kind of message or entertainment. If the purpose of the play is really to “delight all and to offend none,” this can only be done if the audience is ideal, and one of the main points of the Induction is to show how the audience is less than ideal. A few lines later, the Scrivener further dispenses with this relationship: “It is further agreed that every person here have his or their free will of censure, to like or dislike at their own charge, the author having now departed with his right” (Ind. 88-9).

The Induction envisions an end to the right of the author to fully direct the meaning of the play, and this limit to the author’s agency places agency in the unreliable hands of the audience. If Jonson wanted to claim that the author was the beginning and end of the play’s meaning, he could have done so in a way that mocked the audience more mercilessly and asserted his powers more wholeheartedly. The complexities of the Induction respect a distributed agency of play-making that places limits on the role of the author and has serious anxieties about the disorder of both print and performance.
This same anxiety is apparent in the Epilogue to the court performance of the play: “You know the scope of writers, and what store / Of leave is given them if they take not more / And turn it into licence” (lines 3-5). The Epilogue, for obvious reasons, is all too eager to place agency in the hands of the King rather than the author, but there also is a fear about the scope of writers and a wry comment about the limits that are placed on what they can control in their own writing. On the surface these paratexts might indicate that Jonson has gone out of his way to claim sole authorship of his work and assert his bibliographical ego, but what we’ve seen is a recognition of and deep anxiety about the apparent disorder of networked collaboration. We’ll see this same disorder run rampant within the text of the play itself.

IV

In *Bartholomew Fair*, the Fair operates as a synecdoche for the city. We’re introduced to characters from almost every region in Britain, as well as characters that embody specific types of both city and country folk. Many of the city’s most prominent institutions are represented, including livery companies, religions, the law, and members of various occupations. And throughout the play these people and institutions are mediated by and through objects. In Act 4 Scene 4 much of the play’s synecdoche is boiled down even further, into the “game of vapours” that is played by characters whose dialects and names represent their particular regional affiliation. We learn from Knockem that “your prying cat-eyed citizen is an abominable vapour” (4.5.51-2), implying that official citizenship is perhaps an impediment to being a true part of the chaotic, regionally diverse city community that has sprung up in and around the traditional boundaries of walled London. There seems to be a self-awareness of the city’s growth that is presented in the guise of a nearly indecipherable game that confuses all its players.
The drunken revelry and jolly disorder of this particular scene is repeated several times throughout the play. Objects play an important implicit role throughout most of the play, and in certain scenes that role becomes explicit. Consider this exchange with Ursla the Pig Woman in Act 2:

Ursla: Why, would my booth ha’ broke if they had fall’n out in ‘t, sir? Or would their heat ha’ fired it? In, you rogue, and wipe the pigs and mend the fire that they fall not, or I’ll both baste and roast you till your eyes drop out like ‘em. Leave the bottle behind you, and be curst a while.

Quarlous: Body o’ the Fair. What’s this? Mother o’ the bawds?

Knockem: No, she’s mother o’ the pigs, sir, mother o’ the pigs.

Winwife: Mother o’ the Furies, I think, by her firebrand.

Quarlous: Nay, she is too fat to be a Fury; sure some walking sow of tallow.

Winwife: An inspired vessel of kitchen stuff!

Quarlous: She’ll make an excellent gear for the coachmakers here in Smithfield to anoint wheels and axletrees with. (2.5.66-78)

This passage highlights the mistranslation and confusion typical of Bartholomew Fair. In trying to discover the identity of Ursla, Quarlous and Winwife encounter various objects that they use to translate Ursla’s actions into a sensible identity. In these short lines alone, the audience encounters either physically or figuratively a bottle, the pigs, a firebrand, a “vessel,” a gear, wheels, and axletrees. At various points these objects stand in for Ursla’s identity, and the ever-increasing confusion is one of the main sources of comedy in this excerpt (the other main source of comedy coming from Ursla attacking the men with a firebrand). To uncover the nature of the
“Body o’ the Fair” is to include objects and institutions as well as people, and this process of uncovering only seems to lead to greater disorder and confusion. This ongoing process of networked group formation is expressed in the play through the disordered location of the Fair, and I will show in the examples of characters and situations that follow that this disorder drives the eventual resolution of the plot.

John Littlewit is the first character we meet in the play, before the characters even travel to the Fair. If this were any other comedy, his primacy might indicate he was the main or most important character. The complexity of Bartholomew Fair doesn’t allow for a single main character, but Littlewit plays a large role in the disorder to come. The associations and mistranslations that begin with (and are directed toward) him lead to unexpected results. In the first scene we learn he is “one o’ the pretty wits o’ Paul’s, the Little wit of London (so thou art called)” (1.1.11-2). His mental faculties leave something to be desired, and the appellation little seems to suit him. His association with London generally and St. Paul’s specifically associates him immediately with those parts of the city that held most interest for the printed drama industry. We learn only a few lines later that Littlewit’s desire to go to the fair is to see a play he’s written about (more on that later). Also, we learn Littlewit got his name from a larger public of acquaintances: it isn’t a simply self-styled name. Littlewit seems defined by place, and that place is first London, then the Fair.

Littlewit, at least at first, seems like he may be a force for order in the play. As our writer-figure, we might expect him to be a central part of the play’s action. As the ersatz leader of a small band of people who attend the fair, we might expect him to be responsible for the people he’s brought along. He seems to do none of these things, and he’s often content to make
little jokes and be thrown to and fro by the disorder of his surroundings. His lack of leadership, or really any purpose at all, leads his wife to protest their general inaction in the first half of the play: “This is scurvy, that we must come into the Fair and not look on ‘t” (3.2.93-4). On the one hand, Win is complaining about the restrictions placed on their enjoyment of the Fair by the Puritan Busy, but on the other, her comment could’ve been uttered by any character up to this point, or even by the audience: nothing has happened, no one has done anything, and little of the Fair has even been viewed or enjoyed. Instead the characters, particularly Littlewit’s group, spend the three middle acts of the play milling about and interacting with an ever-increasing batch of new characters.

When Littlewit convinces the Puritan Busy to attend the Fair, he says, “Ay, but in state of necessity place should give place, Master Busy” (1.6.61-2). This circular logic is exactly the kind of empty statement that Busy would fall for, but there’s something in it particularly akin to actor-networks. Littlewit’s defining characteristic seems to be the way he lets things happen without a care (the best evidence of this is how often he ignores his pregnant wife). From this line forward, the place just happens to the characters, and Littlewit allows it to happen, right until the curtain goes up on his play.

We find Justice Adam Overdo in a similar situation as Littlewit, but with different particulars. He might be the person in the play (like Sir Alexander in The Roaring Girl) who best understands the distributed nature of knowledge in the networked system:

For alas, as we are public persons, what do we know? Nay, what can we know? We hear with other men’s ears; we see with other men’s eyes. A foolish constable or a sleepy watchmen is all our information: he slanders a gentleman,
but the virtue of his place, as he calls it, and we, by the vice of ours, must believe him. (Jonson 2.1.28-33)

Fed up with taking these lesser men at their word, Overdo misunderstands his own statement and attempts to gather knowledge about “enormities” himself by donning a disguise at the Fair. If he perhaps paid better attention to his own comment about the inability to ever gather real, unmediated knowledge, he may not have, in a word, overdone it. When he later describes another character as “a certain middling thing between a fool and a madman,” he damns himself (2.2.146-7).

It’s easy to laugh at the Justice for not seeing what’s right in front of his eyes. In his appeals to his “friend Ovid,” (2.4.68) he might even stand in for the blindness of the educated in general and Jonson in particular, who was often chided for writing overeducated plays. But if it weren’t for the Justice’s mistranslation of events the play could not move forward. Consider the fact that he follows the cutpurse Edgworth all around the Fair thinking he is a young man that should be protected from the Fair’s obvious evils: “I have followed him all the Fair over, and still I find him with this songster; and I begin shrewdly to suspect their familiarity, and the young man of a terrible taint, poetry! With which idle disease if he be infected there’s no hope of him in a state-course. Actum est of him for a commonwealth’s-man, if he go to ‘t in rhyme once” (3.5.3-9). Many of the other characters, Cokes in particular, could use protecting from Edgworth. Overdo’s inability to see Edgworth for what he is allows the story to move forward. If Overdo was a competent Justice, Edgworth couldn’t carry on until late in the play, affecting the other characters and pushing the plot along.
On the other side of the coin from Overdo is Troubleall. If Overdo seeks to create order and causes only disorder, Troubleall, the very embodiment of disorder, seems to affect only order. Troubleall is unique in the play in that he has a singular, penetrating focus. At times he seems like the only character who’s even able to focus. And he’s focused, unsurprisingly, on an object, the warrant from Justice Overdo that will exonerate him. This concrete object, this physical signature, is the source of and potential cure for Troubleall’s madness. The lack of it makes him mad, and retrieving it may make him sane again. We often find him imploring the other characters for it: “Do you assure me upon your words? May I undertake for you, if I be asked the question, that you have this warrant?” (4.1.48-50). Overdo’s insistence on hiding in plain sight prevents this object from ever existing. Troubleall looks with distrust on assurance from word alone; the warrant is his version of Othello’s “ocular proof.”

Troubleall’s singular interest in the warrant leads him to the belief that it’s the solution not only to his problem, but to all problems: “If Justice Overdo sign to it, I am, and so we are all. He’ll quit us all, multiply us all” (4.3.110-1). This is a lot of power to imbue into a single object, but the absence of this warrant is a symptom of Overdo’s hiding. And his coming out of hiding could eventually lead to a lot of the plot’s resolution. Troubleall’s madness contains some truth, and there’s a point to his disorder.

He even accidentally solves other problems. Take Grace’s potential solution to the problem of choosing between Quarlous and Winwife:

The fitter for what they may be employed in. You shall write, either of you, here, a word, or a name, what you like best--but of two or three syllables at most--and the next person that comes this way (because destiny has a high hand in
business of this nature) I’ll demand which of the two words he or she doth approve; and according to that sentence fix my resolution and affection without change. (4.3.49-56)

It’s Troubleall who comes along and remains as single-minded as ever: “I mark no name but Adam Overdo; that is the name of names. He only is the sufficient magistrate, and that name I reverence. Show it me” (4.6.152-4). Nonetheless he chooses a name and in his way resolves the issue. In doing so he makes the selection of the two suitors a matter that’s truly random and disordered. They chose their names to have particular meaning to the person who came by, but Troubleall wasn’t at all interested in that deeper level of meaning.

Late in the play Dame Purecraft puns on Troubleall’s situation: “Mad, do they call him? The world is mad in error, but he is mad in truth” (4.6.170-1). This is a direct expression of what we’ve already inferred: Troubleall is considered mad because he only has one goal and seeks it at the expense of all others. Troubleall is mad because he’s not disordered. In a world that’s entirely constructed from multivalence and disorder, “mad in error,” a man with an inability to see things from more than one perspective is at a complete disadvantage. All the more remarkable, then, is that this aberration is the cause of chaotic resolutions to some of the play’s subplots.

A third set of characters, Wasp, Bartholomew Cokes, and Busy, are equally ruled by disorder and chaos. All three are punished in the end for their mean, stupid, or condescending ways, but their punishments do nothing to mitigate the disorder that they’ve brought upon the already disordered network of the Fair. Each misunderstands the Fair in some fundamental way, missing either the Fair’s fun, its dangers, or its pleasures, respectively. They all both contribute to and are driven by the Fair’s disorder, but their various roles in misdirection and mistranslation
nonetheless pushes the action forward. These three characters are also further mediated than the others: much of their characterization comes from other characters describing them, rather than from their words or actions. Here’s Quarlous describing the absurdly named Puritan, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy: “By his profession, he will ever be i’ the state of innocence, though, and childhood; derides all antiquity; defies any other learning than inspiration; and what discretion soever years should afford him, it is all prevented in his original ignorance” (1.3.141-5). Each of these characters is a type, but the traits that the audience would expect them to display only come into relief when they’re contrasted with other people and things. When Wasp says to Mistress Overdo “Your reign is out when I am in, dame,” (1.5.20) he underscores an almost symbiotic relationship he has with her. He can only be in power in the absence of others, and as he finds out in the end, this constitutes no real power at all.

Cokes has a similar problematic relationship, but his relationship is not to a particular character: “‘Twas all the end of my journey, indeed, to show Mistress Grace my Fair. I call ‘t my Fair because of Bartholomew; you know my name is Bartholomew, and Bartholomew Fair” (1.5.66-9). Cokes’s naiveté about the Fair, his refusal to believe it could ever harm him, comes out of the foolish association he creates between himself and the Fair. He never gets to the natural reason the two names might be related: that they’re both named for St. Bartholomew. Cokes associates himself more closely to the Fair than any other character, and in doing so leaves himself most open to trouble. Wasp alludes to this when he chastises him for his excitement:

Would the Fair and all the drums and rattles in ‘t were i’ your belly for me! They are already i’ your brain. He that had the means to travel your head,
now, should meet finer sights than any are i’ the Fair, and make a finer voyage on ‘t, to see it all hung with cockleshells, pebbles, fine wheat-straws, and here and there a chicken’s feather and a cobweb. (1.5.94-100)

The presence of objects both inside and outside of Cokes’s head is important here. Wasp alludes to a similarity between the Fair and Cokes’s internal world that Bartholomew himself might be in favor of, but he does so to reinforce Cokes’s emptyheadedness. Wasp also makes a natural comparison between the disordered objects that denote emptiness (pebbles, cobwebs, etc.) in Cokes’s head and the general empty disorder of the Fair.

Both Wasp and Cokes are particularly associated with various objects throughout the play. Wasp typically uses references to an object as a way to insult others: “An I were as you, I’d buy for all my tenants, too: they are a kind o’ civil savages, that will part with their children for rattles, pipes, and knives. You were best buy a hatchet or two and truck with ‘em” (3.4.31-5). Here the contradictory phrase “civil savages” is used to describe a subgroup of urban or suburban people who are so obsessed with commodities that they care more for them than their children. The object Wasp proposes for his insulting trade, though, is a hatchet, which can be used as both a tool and a weapon. This is in miniature what Wasp does throughout the play: he insults others by reducing them to simplistic associations with objects, and sometimes reducing those associations to violent ones.

Cokes’s relationship to objects is quite different. We already saw how he ties himself to the Fair, and how that relationship is realized and mocked through objects. Here’s how Edgworth, who ultimately steals Cokes’s things, describes the hapless naif:
Talk of him to have a soul? Heart, if he have any more than a thing given him instead of salt, only to keep him from stinking, I’ll be hanged afore my time, presently. Where should it be, trow? In his blood? He has not so much to’ard it in his whole body as will maintain a good flea, and if he take this course, he will not ha’ so much land left as to rear a calf within his twelvemonth. Was there ever green plover so pulled! That his little overseer had been here now, and been but tall enough to see him steal pears in exchange for his beaver hat and his cloak thus! (4.2.54-67)

As a thief, it’s not surprising that Edgworth thinks of people in terms of the things he could take from them. What’s interesting in this passage is the way that Cokes’s identity seems bound up with various objects. Imagery of both bodies and things are side by side here. Later, after Cokes loses his things, he commits a similar elision: “I ha’ lost myself, and my cloak and my hat, and my fine sword, and my sister, and Numps, and Mistress Grace (a gentlewoman that I should ha’ married), and a cutwork handkercher she ga’ me, and two purses, today. And my bargain o’ hobbyhorses and gingerbread, which grieves me worst of all” (4.3.82-8). After himself, Cokes goes from objects to people and back to objects. The objects he’s lost are every bit as missed as the people, especially since the items he mentioned would have marked his status as a gentleman. What he’s most upset about, however, are those objects that he had obtained at the Fair, the remnants of his supposed success at navigating the Fair’s social relations.

Busy, Wasp, and Cokes are troublesome and trouble-making characters. Unlike Troubleall, who is so disordered that he affects order, each of these three attempts to impose
some kind of order onto the Fair, usually through invoking certain objects. In doing so, they only create more disorder, until they are eventually silenced in one way or another.

The puppet show that ends the play brings together all the elements we’ve been discussing. In this extended scene the relationships between people and objects, as well as between author and audience, are further examined and complicated. Littlewit’s “puppet play of mine own making” which he “writ for the motion man” (1.5.150-2) finally appears in the play’s final act. The motion man turns out to be Leatherhead, one of the sellers who had spent the majority of the play shouting about his wares: “What do you lack? What is ‘t you buy? What do you lack? Rattles, drums, halberds, horses, babies o’ the best? Fiddles o’ th’ finest?” (2.2.29-31). Leatherhead takes on a new persona as Lantern the puppeteer, and he fulfills a modified version of his original function. He continues to provide the objects and entertainments that people lack, but he does so by imbuing his puppets with personality, wit, and humor.

He also proves himself a shrewd promoter of his own plays:

Oh, the motions that I, Lantern Leatherhead, have given light to i’ my time, since my Master Pod died! ‘Jerusalem’ was a stately thing, and so was ‘Nineveh’, and ‘The City of Norwich’, and ‘Sodom and Gomorrah’, with the rising o’ the prentices and pulling down the bawdy houses there on Shrove Tuesday; but ‘The Gunpowder Plot’, there was a get-penny! I have presented that to an eighteen- or twenty-piece audience nine times in an afternoon. Your home-born projects prove ever the best, they are so easy and familiar. They put too much learning i’ their things nowadays, and that, I fear, will be the spoil o’ this.

(5.1.3-17)
The puppet show is a city comedy, and like *Bartholomew Fair* it was created by the city for the city. As we learn later on, Littlewit has even converted characters from his classical source material to city figures (5.4.119-30). Like *Eastward Ho, Bartholomew Fair* finds its conclusion through a performance and a parody of everything that’s previously happened.

Having the play end with a puppet show, rather than a live play as in the end of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, pays specific attention to the role objects and characters have played throughout the play. Puppets are perfectly suited for this job: they are both characters and objects. Consider Leatherhead’s initial defense of their performance skills: “They are actors, sir, and as good as any, none dispraised, for dumb shows. Indeed, I am the mouth of ‘em all” (5.3.77-9). This ongoing metatheatrical joke to personify the puppets certainly pokes fun at the actors themselves. Beyond this easy mockery, the puppets showcase the ability of objects to move the plot, and they’re most effective at this when causing disorder, as when they make a fool of Busy:

*Busy:* an exceeding great beam; such as are your stage-players, rhymers, and morris dancers, who have walked hand in hand, in contempt of the brethren and the cause, and been borne out by instruments of no mean countenance.

*Leatherhead:* Sir, I present nothing but what is licensed by authority.

*Busy:* Thou art all license, even licentiousness itself, Shimei!

*Leatherhead:* I have the Master of the Revels’ hand for ‘t, sir.

*Busy:* The Master of Rebels’ hand, thou hast: Satan’s! (5.5.9-18)

Following this exchange, we nod along with Grace when she says, “I know no fitter match than a puppet to commit with an hypocrite” (5.5.48-9). More than simply revealing the absurdity of
Busy’s objections, the puppets (and by extension Leatherhead) appeal to a well-worn path of legitimacy that plays have to go through. The wordplay reveals that the puppets seem to know more about the play-making process than Busy does.

Busy also becomes the mouthpiece for traditional arguments against the theater. Taking an advantage objects have over people, the puppets reduce these arguments to absurdity:

Busy: Yes, and my main argument against you is that you are an abomination; for the male among you putteth on the apparel of the female, and the female of the male.

Puppet Dionysius: You lie, you lie, you lie abominably.

Cokes: Good, by my troth; he has given him the lie thrice.

Puppet Dionysius: It is your old stale argument against the players, but it will not hold against the puppets; for we have neither male nor female amongst us. And that thou mayst see, if thou wilt, like a malicious purblind zeal as thou art!

(The puppet takes up his garment.)  (5.5.96-104)

Eventually Busy has no choice but to relent to the disorder of the proceedings. He’s made to look ridiculous by objects.

Like the rest of the action, the puppet play is a completely disordered event. There are multiple interruptions and confusions. Through this environment of disorder, the different conflicts of the play are gradually resolved. Just before the play begins, Wasp gives up on his domineering and relents to becoming a spectator both of the puppets and of the general disorder of the Fair: “The date of my authority is out. I must think no longer to reign; my government is at an end. He that will correct another must want fault in himself” (5.4.98-101). While the puppets
are present on stage, the characters in disguise reveal their identities, including Overdo: “Look upon me, O London, and see me, O Smithfield!” (5.6.33-4). His cries to the city itself to see him, rather than simply the other characters, references the important connections to location that we’ve been seeing all along. Finally, Quarlous puts an end to some of the upheaval not by bringing everything to order, but by restoring matters to their particular state of disorder. He addresses each character in turn, providing pragmatic rather than moral solutions to each problem (5.6.76-93). When he addresses Overdo, he even advises against following the law: “If you have a mind to hang him now and show him your magistrate’s wit, you may, but I should think it were better recovering the goods and to save your estimation in him” (5.6.81-4).

This is not the traditional comedic ending, in which everything is restored to the relative peace at the start of the play. In Bartholomew Fair, each act is equally disordered, and the resolutions to the various characters’ problems don’t bring them any more order than they had before. The ending of the play favors ongoing disorder. When Cokes says to “bring the actors along. We’ll ha’ the rest o’ the play at home,” he refers not simply to the puppets but to the entire disordered apparatus of the play (5.6.118-9). The actor-network of Bartholomew Fair simply goes on when the play ends, just as the social constructs of the city and the Fair equally go on independent of any dramatic presentation.

By tracing Bartholomew Fair’s networks, we find that the concatenations of actors build a logic of disorder. The apparent chaos of the play is actually its basis: the Fair (and by extension the city) is location built around sanctioned disorder that pushes the plot forward and helps the characters to resolve various disputes. This disorder is not at odds with the world of the play; it’s an integral part of it. Looking at the play in terms of its actor-networks reveals this logic and
dispels worries that other critical viewpoints have about the disordered, chaotic environment of Bartholomew Fair.
Conclusion: Branching Out

“Network” is more than a 21st-century buzzword. Scholars in the digital age may find it easy to make analogies between computer science and historical or social events, but these analogies are useless unless deployed carefully. Actor-network theory helps us think beyond digital networks; employing the theory as a methodology can broaden our critical sights to include the overlooked agencies of additional people, places, and objects. Traditionally we assume that Jonson and Chapman, sitting in their cell after the publication of *Eastward Ho*, thought only of Marston, of how he escaped and how they might pin the infraction on him. My supposition is that Jonson and Chapman likely knew better than that: they could not have thought of a Latourian “vast array of entities,” but they certainly had enough knowledge of their own industry to consider others to blame.

My point in the previous chapters has been to show that we as critics should know better as well. By constructing arguments that pay attention to distributed agencies, new stories can be told about familiar texts. What makes the 16th and 17th centuries such a good time period for this kind of analysis is the amount of activity and thought concentrated in one physical location. Again and again the plays I’ve discussed stress the importance of London both to their making and to their representations. London is the first and largest actor in any part of this study. The particular conditions of late 16th- and early 17th-century London make an actor-network approach not only easy, but necessary. There’s simply too much going on in one place to describe things any other way. Jean Howard says of city dramatists that “through their place-based dramatic narratives, playwrights helped representationally to construct the practices associated with specific urban spaces, directing audiences to the uses to which city spaces could
be put and to the privileged modes of conduct and the cultural competencies associated with each” (3). This gives a rather extraordinary amount of agency to the city itself, around and through which various groups and representations are formed. The in-text and around-text actor-networks of *Eastward Ho*, *The Roaring Girl*, *Sir Thomas More*, and *Bartholomew Fair* reveal a “vast array of entities swarming toward” a single actor, and that actor is London.

The groups that form in and around London plays create ongoing attachments and associations. These associations are passed to us through the text, and the centuries-long preservation of these particular books has allowed us to trace networks long past the time when they were visible. If these attachments were not so full of energy in the plays that survive, there would be little we could do as critics to reconstruct them.

The social history of such texts necessitates a broader definition of agency: one that respects the agency of objects, places, and institutions as well as people. By using actor-network theory to explore these agencies we contribute to a digital age scholarship that isn’t obsessed with technology. 16th- and 17th-century city drama presents evidence that there’s nothing new about networks, and that networks are useful for describing the way we live and write in any time period.
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