

Lesser, Zachary, and Peter Sallibrass. "The First Literary Hamlet and the Commonplacing of Professional Plays." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.4 (2008): 371-420. Print.

In their article, Lesser and Sallibrass address a scholarly audience that presumably has an understanding of the distinction between Quarto 1 (Q1) and Quarto 2 (Q2) *Hamlet*. Over the years, it has generally been accepted that the shorter Q1 *Hamlet* is a text designed for performance, whereas Q2 *Hamlet* is a literary text with which readers are more familiar. However, the authors claim that Q1 should rightly be called Shakespeare's first literary drama due to the presence of commonplace markers. Commonplace markers were alterations or markers of lines of text that signified these lines were worthy of writing down and remembering. The commonplace markers in Q1 were ignored for a long time because their presence could not coincide with the popular notion that Q1 was a text constructed from the faulty memory of an actor or playgoer. Ultimately, the authors argue that a literary status for drama, and specifically Shakespeare, was being established much earlier than most assumed, as evidenced by the commonplace markers in Q1.

The authors briefly examine the history of commonplacing and its relation to the commonplacing of professional plays. Commonplacing was a practice first reserved for classical texts, where lines of Greek or Latin were translated into modern vernacular, a practice most often associated with Universities. Because of this relationship with the classics and universities, commonplacing gained a sort of elite status amongst those who engaged in the practice. When publishers such as Nicholas Ling first started adding commonplace markers to modern plays, they were ridiculed by the intellectual community. However, the publishing circle of Bodenham and Ling were on to something, as 1600 saw a boom in dramatic commonplacing. It had become clear that readers valued the wisdom of modern drama just as much as the classics, which was a radical notion at the time. What started as intellectual engagement on the part of readers now flourished into a popular editorial technique. Many playwrights, such as Ben Jonson, saw that commonplace markers appealed to readers and began including them in the first editions of their plays. However, there is little evidence to suggest that Shakespeare had any agency in the commonplacing of his plays, which makes it likely that readers were responsible for the markings in Q1. The only way to see Q1 as an exclusively theatrical play is to ignore commonplace markers altogether.

The authors eventually assert that literary status is not determined by a wealth of novelistic traits or deeper character development, but rather by the process of textual extraction evidenced by commonplacing. The act of commonplacing proves that a text has worth off the stage; readers wanted to remember lines that were widely applicable and served as maxims in their lives, not merely view the play for pleasure's sake. Q1 and Q2 may differ greatly in length, but that does not mean they have to be considered antithetical in purpose. The authors of this article argue that it is not the differences between Q1 and Q2 that are important for classification, but the similarities. Both texts contain commonplace markers, and therefore both should be seen as literary texts. In the decade after 1600, literary drama was constituted through the aggressive assertion that professional plays were equally worthy of commonplacing as the classics, and Q1 *Hamlet* was no exception.