

The First Folio

Sir, – Reviewing Emma Smith’s scholarship on the Shakespeare First Folio of 1623, Brian Vickers (August 11) makes a series of telling mistakes. He is wrong to credit Charlton Hinman with the discovery that “early modern printers did not set type from the manuscript in reading order, as previously thought” but instead first divided the manuscript into notional pages of type in order to set them in a more efficient sequence. In fact, the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* for 1948 carried William H. Bond’s discovery that this was routine practice, seven years before Hinman confirmed that the Shakespeare Folio was made this way.

Discussing proof correction in the Folio, Vickers remarks that “Via these proof sheets Hinman was able to establish the order in which the plays had been set and printed between 1621 and 1623”. Proof sheets told Hinman no such thing (because they cannot): he deduced the order of printing from the recurrence across the book of distinctly damaged pieces of type and the pattern of reuse of headlines.

Where the 1623 Folio prints Shakespeare plays that had already appeared two or three decades earlier in quarto editions, we find that old-fashioned linguistic forms are modernized. Vickers imagines that this required “editors” and complains that Smith does not believe that the Folio was edited. She is quite right not to, since scribes and compositors were perfectly capable of updating old-fashioned forms by themselves, and the term “editing” should be reserved for the scholarly correction of error that began with Nicholas Rowe’s edition of 1709.

GABRIEL EGAN

De Montfort University, Leicester.

