

Bacon's Promus

In the British Museum (Harleian Collection No. 7017) is Francis Bacon's Promus, or Notebook, containing some 1,600 notes jotted down between the years 1594-6. All these notes are in Bacon's own handwriting. The book is a storehouse of turns of expression, which Bacon could draw upon for use in his literary work. Among other things, it contains 203 English proverbs.

Is it a coincidence that, of these proverbs, 152 (or three-fourths) have been found directly quoted or alluded to in the "Shakespeare" plays?

It must be remembered that the Promus was a *private* note-book of Bacon's, and Will Shaksper could not have had access to it: also that the Promus was written *before* most of the "Shakespeare" plays appeared, so Bacon could not have borrowed much from "Shakespeare."

In 1605, after he had tested the value of his Promus in his own experience, he wrote, "I am not ignorant of the prejudice imparted to the use of commonplace books, but I hold the keeping of them to be of great use in studying."

Is it a coincidence that "Shakespeare," in "Sonnett 77," advises every scholar to keep a commonplace book, as follows:

"Look; what thy memory cannot contain
Commit to these waste blacks {black leads}; and thou shalt find
Those children nurs'd deliver'd from thy brain
To take a new acquaintanace of thy mind
These offices, so oft as thou wilt look
Shall profit thee, and much enrich thy book."

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