

Some Notes on William Harmon, “Paronomastics”*

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Our intellectual orders tend to be luminously, sometimes too luminously, coherent at their centers but then at their peripheries trail off waywardly into disalliance and irrelevance; and this latter is good, sparing us the harsh clashings of unyielding orders by becoming fuzzy at the edges, able to mesh with the contiguous edges of other orders.

Professor Harmon’s brilliant making here of a central drift from peripheral gleanings fills me, as all his work does, with admiration, nay, astonishment. I can argue no exception to this article, but I offer the caution of an addition. It may be, as some psychologists propose, that there is nothing coincidental in the makings of human mind, and I have no doubt that Professor Harmon employs a highly refined filter to separate the coincidental from the intended. Some complexes *outside* intention, though, exemplify occasions when it is very hard to notice the difference.

While reading this morning an article in a literary magazine by a person whose last name is West, I suddenly wondered if I had ever read anything by a person named East. I wondered if more people are named West than East, and, if so, even, why? My recall of names is not what it used to be, so I decided to check the local (Ithaca, NY) phone book. There I found 25 Wests but only one East. An extraordinary preference and imbalance. But looking a little further on, I saw that there are 26 Eastmans. East shines when personified—the glorious birth of the East Man! But then I wondered if there are Westmen? Only one Westman.

*Reference: William Harmon, “Paronomastics: The Name of the Poet from Shakespeare and Donne to Glück and Morgan,” *Connotations* 2.2 (1992): 115-25.

I'm sure these divergences and symmetries are to be read in deeply meaningful ways, but I am struck by the mere fact of the symmetry of one East and one Westman in our book. It makes my heart sing. It fills my life with order. It connects the unconnectible, and I have no fear of, but joy in, connection.

Adding a redundant caution to Professor Harmon's great preparedness, I extend my appreciation for his work and my awe of his mind capable beyond the discernment, connection, and order of computers.

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