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Introduction

At first sight the question in my title - is Boris Johnson an Individual (capital I) – may seem to be a silly one. For is not everyone an individual? To say that someone is an individual is like saying a rose is a flower (as well as being a rose). It is to state the blindingly obvious. If so, it may seem strange that, to some people, the term 'individual' can have pejorative associations. In his novelistic exploration of the conflict between Istanbul-based. Westernising secularists and provincial, more traditional muslims in modern Turkey, Orhan Pamuk puts these words into the mouth of his most fervently articulate Islamist. Blue:-

'There's a [Turkish word] Europhiles very commonly use when they denigrate our people [i.e. orthodox muslims]: to be a true Westerner, a person must first become an individual, and then they go on to say that, in Turkey, there are no individuals!' (Pamuk 2010, 331).

Boris Johnson is, however, about as far away from these Turkish muslims as could be imagined. Of course he is an individual, in every sense of the term. It is an offense to common-sense to suggest otherwise. Indeed, it is difficult to think of a modern politician who is a bigger 'personality' than Boris Johnson, or whose career has been marked by such shameless self-promotion. The strategically and self-

consciously witty 'Boris' embodies individualism, an ideology that has now been whole-heartedly adopted by his political party, the Conservatives. His individualism is both personal and ideological. It is both what he is and what he believes in.

Let us take a closer look at his 'individualism'. To be sure, in his speech and action, Mr Johnson proclaims his difference with others of his kind, that is with others of that despised breed we call politician. He is no technocrat, no mere manager; nor he an is professionalised and whip-tamed product of the Westminster Bubble. He has Hinterland, he has Character, and, if push came to shove, he could do Something Else (write novels, do more journalism). Despite all this, as he sometimes acknowledges, he has not quite made it on his own. He owes much to his family and to the various institutions of which he was a part (Eton College, Oxford University, the Conservative party, and even the Bullingdon Club). In his 2008 campaign for the post of Mayor of London, he emphasised the diverse parts of his background and ancestry, claiming that he embodies (in his person) not so much 'individualism' as the ethnic and social diversity of London itself. In other words, one could argue that Boris here presented himself as being as much dividual as individual in the sense anthropologists now use. This term dividual – has been invented to deal with

personhood in Melanesia, which has struck anthropological researchers as being quite different from personhood in the modern West. To quote Dame Marilyn Strathern:-

'Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite side of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm'. (Strathern 1988, 13)

Homer's Heroes

To Strathern and many other anthropologists, there is a sharp divide between Western (Euro-American) and Melanesian persons. You could, to put it crudely, easily draw up a classic 'structural' diagram that would look like this:-

Individual	Dividual
Western (Euro- American)	Melanesian (and Indian)
Bounded, autonomous	Fractal, socially defined
Modern	Ethnographic
Rational Subject	Irrational Subject
Historic (literate civilisation)	Prehistoric (oral culture)

Where do Homer's heroes lie on this particular divide? If you believe, as many do, that it is in ancient Greece that the Individual first Arose, and that ancient Greek culture is essentially Western (and

Rational), and that there is a direct line of cultural and intellectual progress that leads from the first stirrings of rational thought amongst the pre-Socratic philosophers to those supremely rational beings, the fellows of New College Oxford, then you would be likely to place Homer's heroes on the 'individual' side of the divide. For who could be more self-willed, more individual than Achilles or Odysseus, the protagonists of the *Iliad* and the Odyssey respectively? And is there a clearer authorial or artistic personality than Homer himself?

These issues are not quite as straightforward as one might think. Homer, his epics and his heroes, have long various intellectual chronological boundaries. 'Homeric' scholars comprise philologists, literary critics, historians (e.g. Raaflaub 1998) and archaeologists. The Homeric epics emerge in that shadowy no man's land between prehistoric and historic periods sometimes call 'proto-history'. Everyone now accepts that the epics are rooted in a tradition of oral poetry, and it is by no means clear when and how the Iliad and the *Odvssev* came to be written down and so become relatively definitive (and fixed) texts. On the one hand there are those who adhere to the standard view of the 1960s and 1970s – that the Homeric epics reached a recognisable form in the years just before 700 BC; on the other there is a strong argument to the effect that the first definitive texts could have been produced no earlier than the mid-sixth century BC (with changes to the text continuing down into Hellenistic times, 3rd to 2nd centuries BC). There is moreover an endless and inconclusive dispute about where we should place 'the world of Homer': in the Mycenaean world? In the Aegean Bronze Age? In the Iron Age of the twelfth to eighth centuries BC? In the Archaic period, of around 750 to 480 BC? Or simply nowhere in time and space outside of the poems themselves (see Snodgrass 1974)?

The individuality (dividual/ individual) of Homer himself has been doubted. That is, the idea that Homer was an identifiable person, who can be placed in time and place, and who (in whatever sense, whether orally or in writing) was/is the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. At least one Oxford scholar (West 1999) thinks that Homer is an invention of the sixth century BC, and others (e.g. Nagy 1995;1997) see 'Homer' as much process as person. For Nagy and for other scholars, 'Homer' is simply the name we give to that concatenation of performances, first purely oral and then only partly literate, that led, somewhat mysteriously to the texts we now have. It should not then surprise us that Homeric personhood (dividual vs individual) should also have arisen as a major issue in recent years. And it is none other than Boris Johnson who has raised it.

In an interview with the *Guardian* newspaper in 2011 Boris Johnson was asked whether he had found the job of being Mayor of London at all difficult. He replied with a quotation that obviously baffled the reporter:- 'τέτλαθιδή, κραδίη; καὶκύντερον ἄλλοποτ' ἔτλης,' (Homer, Od, 20: 18).

Now of course Boris Johnson here is showing off — that is displaying his individualism. He is, by quoting ancient Greek, differentiating himself from the general run of (uncultured) politicians (no Hinterland, no Character) — who else of his tribe could do so? It was not clear that he meant to be understood by, of all people, a *Guardian* journalist. Does anyone from the Metro-left still know any Greek? All this is true, and in keeping with Boris' public character. In this it is easy to forget that the quote is also a perfectly sensible reply to the question put.

Roughly and unpoetically translated, the quote means 'bear up, [my] heart; once you suffered worse'. The

context is the Odyssey, where Odysseus is disguised as a beggar in his own palace in Ithaka, and recalls a worse time, when he was in Polyphemos' cave. Johnson was indicating that he had indeed found the job of mayor trying - but that he had seen worse [κύντερον – kynteron – literally 'more dog-like'] - and he mustn't complain. But Boris Johnson is also, if inadvertently, drawing attention to one of the unusual if distinctive features of Homeric speech – the tendency of heroes to address not themselves, but their parts (heart [kradie], liver [hetor], or chest [phrenes in the plural]), and to address these parts in the second person. This tendency was once a hot topic in Classical studies. Is this form of words merely a façon de parler, a form of speech, with no further significance? Or does it indicate a more radical difference between Homer's heroes and modern-day individuals? Did Homeric heroes have a proper sense of self? Did they talk either about their soul or their body? The distinguished German classical scholar Bruno Snell thought not (Snell 1975, 17; cf Snell 1953). For Snell, Homeric Greeks lacked a sense of the 'whole' person, and in this early stage the later word for body (soma) refers exclusively to corpses. Moreover Snell saw representations of bodies in the Geometric period (that is, bodies in Geometric art) as being not bodies at all, but assemblages of parts.

What Snell was saying is that Geometric pot painters are not simply 'bad' at representing the human body. It is not that they have a conception of the body, but lack the artistic means of representing it in a convincing way (as later Classical pot painters were to do). Geometric painters lack a conception of a body as a whole, and with it a conception of the self as a whole. So, on this tripod stand from the Athenian Kerameikos, bodies are represented as being identical with shields, whether round or 'figure of eight'; and on the Agora oinochoe, there is

no clear distinction between the bodies of these 'Siamese twins' (if that is what they are) and their cuirass or armour. Warriors (or heroes) perhaps are not wholes, but a bit of a shield attached to a spear attached to a helmet.

Snell was not alone. In a similar vein the Irish (if Oxford-based) scholar E.R. Dodds (1951, 1-27) explored the tendency of Homeric heroes to place moral responsibility for actions (or at least actions that go badly wrong) not on themselves but on outside agents. When Agamemnon apologises to Achilles for seizing Briseis (the action that provokes the 'wrath of Achilles', which is the main motor of the plot of the *Iliad*), he claims that it wasn't *him*, it was this *ate* [madness] sent to me from Zeus that *made* him do it (*Iliad*. 19.86-90).

Now this school of thought - the idea that, in the world of Homer, there was no unified sense of either the body (soma) or the self – remains controversial. In one sense it seems to defy common sense. For both major poems have protagonists heroes in the full sense of the term – and it is these heroes who form the subject of the poem, Achilles for the *Iliad*, and Odysseus for the Odyssey. But it would, I think, be a mistake to see them as protagonists in the modern sense of an individual whose character and whose choices drive the plot of a novel. The poems are not novels, and certainly not ones where individual character is what matters. Looked at in another way, it is not Achilles so much as his wrath – μηνινΑχιλλεωςαειδω-'I sing of the wrath of Achilles' (Iliad 1.1) – that the poet sings about; and it is both his wrath and his desire for kleos (fame, or the desire for fame) that drives the plot. Similarly, Odvsseus does not achieve his return to Ithaca through the strength of his character or through an act of will. True, he is 'polymetis', of many wiles, but the plot of the Odyssey makes it clear that he wouldn't have got back there without the goddess Athena's constant interference on

his behalf. In one sense it is not the heroes but the gods who are the true moral agents in both poems – they make the decisions, and responsibility for outcomes (insofar as such a thing exists) resides with them. In another sense it is *kleos* (fame) and *menis* (wrath) that drive the poem forward, and these qualities attach themselves as much to things as to persons – (this is what I want to explore below).

This fact is troubling to modern readers, who want to read both poems as if were nineteenth-century written by an identifiable author like Tolstoy or George Eliot. Modern literary critics such as Harold Bloom (e.g. Bloom 1995) may esteem Homer, but invariably place him lower in their canon than Shakespeare or Tolstoy precisely because Homer's heroes appear to be individual than (say) Shakespeare's. Bloom believes that 'the individual self is the only method and the whole standard for apprehending aesthetic value'(Bloom 1995, 23) and in such a Romantic framework Homer's lack of emphasis on the individual, and the individual's will and agency, cannot be to the poet's credit. For Bloom (referencing Dodds, Snell and Fraenkel) 'Achilles, the best of the Achaeans, essentially childlike is [emphasis mine], because there is no integration of his intellect, his emotions and his sense impressions (Bloom 1995, 208). This I think mis-represents both Dodd and Snell. While it is true that both Dodd's view and Snell's view seem very much at odds with the idea that Homeric could approximate modern heroes individuals (whether real or literary) they are not saying that Homeric heroes are children. This is a modernist or aesthetic misreading of their arguments, and one that takes no account of differences in personhood. It is true however that their arguments seem to imply that Homeric heroes could not be the locus of individual responsibility and moral agency, and it is that has vexed other modern this

interpreters – in this case modern philosophers. In his 1993 Sather lectures Shame and Necessity Bernard Williams (1993) argued strenuously that these peculiarities of Homeric speech are just that - façons de parler no more. The Homeric self, the Homeric individual is for Williams not substantially different from the modern one. Homer, and his heroes, has (implicitly) a sense of self, a self which remains the locus of moral responsibility and moral agency. Of course, Williams has to argue this way. The twin projects of humanism and secularism – the Enlightenment project – depend on there being individuals, morally autonomous persons capable of assessing beliefs in an objective and rational fashion, and so gradually coming to reject all superstitions (i.e. religions). Individualism is a condition of modernity. Those who cannot become, or do not consider themselves to be, individuals (like Orhan Pamuk's Blue) are locked out Modernity, and it is perhaps therefore not a surprise that they cling to 'Religion'.

Here I must put down my cards. I agree with Dodds and Snell, and so disagree not only with Williams and Bloom but also with the current consensus within Homeric literary scholarship (e.g. Finkelberg 2012). Homeric heroes and speakers are not individuals, in the Euro-American modern. Contemporary personhood (sensu Fowler 2004; 2010) and Homeric personhood are quite different. Moreover, not only are modern forms of personhood absent in Homer, so are particular kinds of agency (sensu Gell 1998). Homer's heroes do not treat things as (we imagine) we do, as inanimate and disentangled from the everyday. Homeric material entanglements are quite distinct from those entailed by requirements of contemporary individualism. But to explain this I will have to go far, far away from both Boris Johnson and the Iron Age Mediterranean.

Homer's Heroes: From Melanesia to Iron Age Greece

In the early twentieth century anthropologists noticed that mechanisms for the exchange of goods in the region of Papua New Guinea were quite different from what one would expect. There was an expectation, derived from evolutionary theory, that what one encounters in 'primitive' society is a form of barter, and that barter eventually leads to forms of exchange closer to the use of money to obtain commodities. These were regarded as the most efficient mechanisms for providing human needs. Instead what anthropologists such as Malinowski encountered in these regions something that came to be known as gift exchange – later theorised for us by Marcel Mauss (1954). In the classic kula system of the Trobriand Islands goods did not simply move, but went in a circle (Malinowski 1922). More peculiarly, some of these goods kept on coming back over long cycles – clearly they were not fulfilling some economic need, narrowly defined. In the course of these cycles, objects acquired 'biographies', associations with particular named persons.

One might have expected such a 'primitive' system to wither in the face of modernity. Melanesians would abandon their strange ways (perhaps with the help of the many Business Schools which sprung up in Western universities) and move to a commodity-based economy. It then surprised many anthropologists, revisiting these areas in the 1970s and 1980s, that this transition had not taken place (Leach and Leach 1983). The kularing remained as vigorous as ever. This fact prompted researchers to look a little closer at what things were exchanged and how. One thing that they found was that the relationship between people and things - what has recently come to be entanglements' termed 'material

'human-thing entanglements' (Hodder 2011) – bears more than a passing similarity to descriptions of Homeric objects. Weiner (1992) for example, in arguing that objects within the kula ring and elsewhere in Melanesia and Polynesia. were never truly given away - that they always retained the associations of their previous owners - could not refrain from quoting lines of Homer where the same idea seems to apply. Munn (1986), in her more detailed re-examination of the kula ring, compared the quality that attached to objects butu [fame] to Homeric kleos. In her re-appraisal, objects not people became the subjects of fame songs (Munn 1986, 292 n.14). It was these observations – the idea that objects always remain attached to all the owners in the exchange cycle, and that they are never truly given away – that led in part to the notion of the 'dividual'. These notions were further extended in **Nicholas** Thomas' (1991) Entangled Objects (where objects move from the gift to the commodity sphere and back again, and become entangled with the social lives of different cultures, and indeed mediate encounters between them), and Alfred Gell's (1998) notion of agency (where it is the object as much as the person which is endowed with animism) and of the distributed person.

Here I come to the nub of my argument. In agency Homer personhood are closely connected and Homer's heroes have much more in common with that anthropological entity, the 'dividual' than they do with modern individuals (at least as conceived by philosophers such as Williams). Homer's protagonists, like Melanesian dividuals, act within complex reciprocities of gender and artefacts. Like 'ethnographic' Melanesians and Polynesians, Homeric heroes are entangled with particular objects with extended biographies.

Examples are many (Grethlein 2008). They include Agamemnon's sceptre, which provides legitimation for

his claim to rule over all the Achaeans at Troy (*Iliad* 2. 180-88). Another example particularly pertinent to my argument is the exchange between Odysseus and Meriones (Il. 10.260-271; see Hainsworth 1993, 178-181), in which Odysseus is given a helmet made from boars' tusks. This helmet has quite an elaborate backstory, or biography: it was given to Odysseus by Meriones, who was given it Molos, who was given it Amphidamas, who in turn was given it by Autolykos, who took it from Amyntor. In this way, the helmet travels from Eleon (in Boeotia), to Kythera, to Crete, to Troy and (perhaps) Ithaka (see Borchhardt 1972, 81 fig. 7). The description is full enough (and the object itself sufficiently unusual) for there to be no doubt that it refers to a type of helmet that turns up in tombs, first on the Greek mainland in the area around Mycenae, and then in Crete, in the Late Bronze Age between 1500 to1200 BC. Indeed, for Homeric scholars it remains the only artefact whose description places it firmly in the Bronze and not the Iron Age. While the artefact type does certainly originate in the Late Bronze Age, the form of material entanglement this description represents must belong to a later period, to the very end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. Indeed, the boar's tusk helmet is one of a range of antiques whose exotic origin, context and deposition illustrates precisely such 'material entanglements', which can be dated fairly confidently to the period 1150-900 BC (that is, the beginning of the Iron Age).

This is not because most examples of this helmet are of Iron Age date – most are Bronze Age. There are however two chronological and geographical outliers, one in Achaea (which need not detain us here), and one from Knossos. This was found in tomb 201, dated from its associated finds to around 1150-1100 BC (Coldstream and Catling 1996, 191-5). It is therefore an antique, and in this sense

better fits with Homer's description than earlier examples. This and other objects were found with a number of other antiques in one of the earliest examples of a male 'warrior' cremation burial to be found in the Early Iron Age. When Hector Catling (Catling 1995) first published parts of this grave he argued that this kind of burial represented one of the real heroes returned from the Trojan War. This is not guite as foolish as it seems. The male body of the 'warrior', accompanied by bronze weapons, was thoroughly burnt in a manner that recalls the cremation of both Patroklos and Hector in the Iliad (23.161-257; 24.782-804). And it was not only the body that was burnt - with him was the 'ruin' (Hector Catling's words; Catling 1996, 517-8; cf Pappasavvas 2001, 82-4 and 241-2 no. 26) of a Cypriot bronze four-sided stand. Like the boar's tusk helmet, this too must have been an antique at the time of its deposition.

The Cypriot four-sided stand, though clearly an antique, is not mentioned in Homer. It does however turn up in the literature of another East Mediterranean people whose Iron Age achievements are still with us. In the Book of Kings (Kings 1.7.27-39) such stands (cf Pappasavvas 2001, 146-9) are part of the cult equipment of the Temple of Solomon, where their manufacture is ascribed to Hiram of Tyre. The way they are described forms an interesting contrast to Homeric description (Whitley 2013, 399-402). While Homeric descriptions either biographical are (describing the various associations that have accumulated to the object through its passage through various owners), or ekphrastic (where the description of the object provides an occasion for a narrative within a narrative), the description of these stands is rigorously factual, with great attention paid to the object's size and weight. The ancient Hebrews, it seems, were not interested in biographical objects. To return to tomb 201: it has been argued (Whitley 2000; 2002) that this form of ostentatious destruction of male bodies in association with weapons and antiques, antiques which had by this time acquired quite an extensive object biography, is part of a new form both of material entanglement or personhood. It represents a form of 'human-thing entanglement' (sensu Hodder 2011) that is not to be found in the Bronze Age. It is moreover 'human-thing agendered form of entanglement'- it is males (in the first instance) who are treated to this form of ostentatious destruction in death, and (generally) not females or children. Certainly, the warrior grave cremation becomes characteristic of many (but not all) Aegean communities in the middle of the Early Iron Age around 900 BC, particularly in Athens (D'Onofrio 2011). This gendered polarity can be seen at its starkest in this double burial, the 'hero's grave' from Lefkandi, where the cremated remains of a male warrior with a broken iron sword are accompanied by a rich female inhumation (Popham et al. 1993, 17-22). Here the cremated remains of a warrior are interred in another Cypriot antique, a bronze amphoroidkrater (Catling 1993; cf. Catling 1964, 156-61; 1984). The shape is, in a sense, ambiguous. On the one hand it is a krater, for mixing water with wine as the centrepiece of some drinking practice that must be the ancestor Classical symposium. biographies of such kraters (silver ones) are described in detail on two occasions in the Homeric poems: once when this krater is given as a prize for the funeral games of Patroklos (*Iliad* 23.740-9), and once in the Odyssey when Telemachus receives a similar parting gift (with a slightly less elaborate biography) from Menelaus (Odyssey 4: 613-9; 15. 113-19). On the other hand it is an amphora, and could conceivably have been called a phiale, the vessel used to inter the ashes of Patroklos (Iliad 23.243 and 253) and the one object that links the narratives of both Homeric epics, in that it was used finally to inter the

cremated remains of Achilles too (*Odyssey* 24.74; see Burgess 2009).

All this is to say that the material entanglements we see in Homer – the way that the kraters and helmets are exchanged amongst peers, but exchanged in such a way that they never quite lose their associations with their previous owners – have much more in common with Melanesia than with modernity. Nor are such entanglements necessarily characteristic of all the peoples of the Iron Age Mediterranean, as the very matter-offact descriptions of Hiram's stands shows. These observations have other implications however. We need to look at the narrative role of objects in both epics, and the wider implications for our understanding of the process of their composition.

How do we date the poems?

Thirty or even twenty years ago the general consensus about the Homeric poems was that they were composed around 700 BC. They were the earliest poems in Greek, and the start of Western literature. Images such as the one on a mid 7th century BC Protoattic amphora from Eleusis showing the blinding Polyphemos were held to provide a clear terminus ante quem for the composition of the Odvssev (see Snodgrass 1998). As the Odyssey was generally held to be later than the *Iliad*, then these images provided a date for that too (see Wade-Gery 1952).

This consensus held for a very long time – as late as 1986 (e.g. Morris 1986) the date of circa 700 BC for the composition of the Homeric poemswas held to be 'something that everyone knew'. Indeed, so firm was this consensus that Barry Powell (1991) could use it as a datum for his revival of Wade-Gery's (1952) suggestion that the Greek alphabet (with vowels) was invented *specifically* to transcribe the text of Homer's *Iliad*. This consensus has however now broken down. Many scholars still adhere to the date of

circa 700 BC (e.g. Ulf 2009; Raaflaub 1998), but many do not. The Harvard scholar Gregory Nagy (1997) has proposed quite a different model for the composition of the Homeric poems that suggests that they did not reach any kind of written form until around 550 BC. One of the reasons for this shift in view was a reconsideration of the iconographic evidence. For one thing, these mid 7th century images of the blinding Polyphemos are a bit of a one off (Snodgrass 1998). There are no clear images that derive from either poem in the late 7th or early 6th centuries BC. Indeed, while images from the Epic Cycle and the Trojan War are quite common on black and red figure vases of the sixth century, images that clearly derive from an authoritative text of either of the Homeric poems are far less common. So we get images from other poems in the Epic Cycle, such as the *Ilioupersis* (the Fall of Trov) but few from either *Iliad* or *Odvssev*. Where we have scenes that seem to relate to either poem, it seems to be a version which is non-canonical: in funeral games of Patroklos on the François vase from Chiusi/ Clusim (see Beazley 1986, 24-34), datable to around 560 BC, the dramatis personae are not those given in Iliad 23.261-538; similarly the depiction of 'Sleep and Death carrying away Sarpedon' on the Euphronioskrater from Cerverteri, once in New York (Boardman 1975, 33, frontispiece and fig. 22) is hardly a direct, visual transcription of *Iliad* 16.676-83 (Whitley 2012, 586-87), since in our text of the *Iliad* it is Apollo, not Hermes who is sent. Only around 480 BC do we have scenes which unambiguously derive from a near canonical text, as on a stamnos by the Siren painter showing Odysseus and Museum Sirens (British 1843.1103,31 from Vulci). Indeed, one could argue that the first scene on a Greek vase that derives unambiguously from the text of Homer is this scene on a vase by the Brygos painter in Vienna, which shows

Priam pleading with Achilles for the body of his son Hector (*Iliad* 24.469-84).

What does remain constant however is the importance of things, of objects, within the poem, or rather the Epic Cycle as a whole – as in the image of Thetis giving Achilles his original divine armour found on an amphora from Orvieto painted by the Amasis painter now in Boston (Boston 01.8027; Beazley 1986, 152 no. 27). The German scholar Jonas Grethlein (2008) has recently explored the role of objects, and of objects, which carry memories of the past, in the poems. Looked at in this way, the original arms of Achilles form one of the protagonists, or agents, within the Iliad (Iliad 17. 194-7; 18.84-5; 22.322-3; cf Whitley 2013, 399). When Achilles sulks they go out of commission. He then lends them to Patroklos in book 16, armour which contributes to Patroklos' temporary success. They are then taken by Hector, and fought over again by Achilles. The object is a pivotal agent in the plot.

Does this then provide a good reason for supposing that, in general, Homer's heroes have more to do with Melanesia than Modernity? Well, up to a point. It depends on whether you believe in what might be called the theory of the individual – that the notion of individual provides an adequate and convincing account of the modern, Euro-American sense of self. Here I think juridico-political notions of individual responsibility and autonomy are at odds with the stories that modern people read and tell about themselves.

Entanglements Ancient and Modern

Homeric entanglements turn up in surprising places. Objects acting as agents, as dramatis personae, within a narrative, even 'literary' novels that assume some notion of individuality and autonomy. They are, of course, much more common in derided genre fiction (crime fiction,

science fiction and fantasy). Moving a little closer to Boris Johnson and twenty-first century London is early twentieth-century Dublin, where this exchange (both verbal and material) is alleged to have taken place in a public house on the 16th June 1904

'Then did you, chivalrous Terence, hand forth, as to the manor born, that nectarous beverage and you offered the crystal cup to him that thirsted, the soul of chivalry, in beauty akin to the immortals'

'But he, the young chief of the O'Bergan's, could ill brook to be outdone in generous deeds but gave therefore with gracious gesture a testoon of costliest bronze. Thereon embossed in excellent smithwork was seen the image of a queen of regal port, scion of the house of Brunswick, Victoria her name, Her Most Excellent Majesty, by grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British dominions beyond the sea, queen, defender of the faith, Empress of India, even she, who bore rule, a victress over many peoples, the wellbeloved, for they knew and loved her from the rising of the sun to the going done thereof, the pale, the dark, the ruddy and the ethiop'

Here we have returned to Polyphemos cave, to which our protagonist Boris was alluding when he quoted that passage in the Odyssey.

The cave here is a public house, our Odysseus is Mr Leopold Bloom, and Polyphemos the one-eyed Irish nationalist the Citizen (Joyce 1960, 387). deliberately over-elaborate this description an exchange of commodities has been turned into that Homeric/Melanesian trope, an exchange of gifts. But this is more than a good Irish joke about paying a penny for a pint. The objects concerned are, in many ways, overdetermined. The power of the British

Empire is inscribed on the penny; the pint stands for a certain kind of Irish nativism. There is some serious politics here.

Is there then some serious politics in Boris Johnson's seemingly jovial quote? I would say that there is more going on than Boris' trying to impress a journalist, or demonstrating that he has 'Hinterland'. Inadvertently, he is raising a dilemma that troubles all politicians. The Conservative party to which he belongs has never quite managed to make up its mind about how much it should value institutions, and so a sense of belonging to institutions, and how much it should let rip with American-style individualism. These issues can be seen as

issues of personhood. Is our being, our sense of self, tied up with other people, other things, or other institutions? If so we are 'dividuals' rather than individuals. Or are we truly autonomous individuals, operating within a society and a market that is entirely free, and so the authors of our 'free' choices? These issues remain unresolved in Boris as in any other of our major politicians (of whatever party). Boris does not really know whether he is or should be an individual, or a dividual who is part of a wider whole, and whose parts reside somehow elsewhere. We are perhaps far less modern than we think.

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