

The Change of Cromwell's Ethical Identity: from Blacksmith's Son to Baron Cromwell

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Abstract: This thesis aims to analyze the change of Thomas Cromwell's ethical identity--from blacksmith's son to Baron Cromwell to reveal the reason and process of the formation of ethical identity, and the obligations and responsibilities his ethical identity requires. In addition, this thesis will also analyze the function of the language which Wolsey, Henry VIII and other people use to the construction of Cromwell's ethical identity.

Keywords: Thomas Cromwell; ethical identity; obligations and responsibilities; language; change

1. Introduction

Humans' identity is one's identification in the society that he lives, one needs to take on the responsibilities and obligations that his identity requires. From its origin, identity can be classified into two categories. A person can have his identity when he was born, like the identity of daughter or son, mother or father, which is determined by the blood, this is one category of identity. One can gain his own identity in the society after his birth, like the identity of husband and wife, and this is the other category of identity. From its origin, one's identity is the result of one's self selection (Nie Zhenzhao 2014, 263)^[5]. Moreover, one premise of making moral evaluations is one's ethical identity. In reality, ethics requires that one's behavior should be in line with his identity (Nie Zhenzhao 2014, 264)^[5].

In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Thomas Cromwell has many ethical identities, for instance, he is the son of Walter Cromwell, a blacksmith and brewer; he is the husband of Liz Wykys; he is the father of three children: Gregory, Anne and Grace; he is the enemy for Stephan Gardiner, the cardinal's secretary; he is the servant for Thomas Wolsey, archbishop of York and the cardinal; he is the courtier for the king, Henry VIII and so on. Just as Hilary Mantel says in her interview by Anna Murphy: "When you have got someone going from blacksmith's son to Earl of Essex in that rigid society you have to want to know how he did it (Hilary Mantel 2010)^[4]," on Cromwell's way from a blacksmith's son to Baron Cromwell in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, his ethical identities of being the son of a blacksmith, the servant for Thomas Wolsey and the courtier for Henry VIII deserve exploration. Similarly, the responsibilities and obligations he bears should also be paid attention to. What's more, the words Wolsey, Henry VIII and other people say plays an important role in the construction of Cromwell's ethical identity.

2. The Son of the Blacksmith

The historical novel, *Wolf Hall*, starts with the plot that Thomas Cromwell is knocked down by his father, Walter Cromwell. Not only the first page, but also the first part of the chapter tells us that Walter treats Cromwell badly. For example, blood from the gash on his head-which was his father's first effort-is trickling across his head (Hilary mantel 2010, 3)^[4]. He lifts his head an inch or two, and moves forward, on his belly, trying to do it without exposing his hands, on which Walter enjoys stamping (Hilary mantel 2010, 3)^[4]. From these examples, it is clear that the relationship between Thomas Cromwell and his father is extremely intense. Cromwell was not treated kindly by his father, Walter. He is always hit and mistreated by Walter. But even so, it is difficult for Cromwell to change this terrible situation, for the ethical identity of being the blacksmith's son is a kind of ethical identity which he is born with, it is determined by the blood, so he cannot change it.

As far as Cromwell is concerned, even though his father abuses him, kicks him and treats him

cruelly, he agrees the parents-children relationship between him and Walter. This makes him bear his father's abuse. And this means that he separates himself from animals in essence; also, he knows his obligations and duties his ethical identity of being a son requires.

As a son, one should respect his father and one has a duty to support his father when his father is old. In the same case, Thomas Cromwell should respect his father and it is his duty to take care of his father when his father is old. In Putney, Thomas Cromwell has had enough of his father, so he makes up his mind to kill Walter if Walter kicks him once again. However, he knows clearly that if he kills Walter, he will be hanged. Killing a person means committing a crime, let alone killing his father, who has a kinship with him. As a person of ethical consciousness, he will not do such things. So his ethical identity always reminds him of the fact that he is the son of Walter Cromwell, hence, he can neither hit back nor kill Walter. Under this circumstances, the human factor in his body is the dominate factor, making him respect his father. The animal factor of striking back when he is abused by his father is restrained by his human factor.

But the days with Walter Cromwell almost suffocates him, in order to escape from the hard times, he chooses to leave home and this is the only choice he can make to survive. When he runs away from Putney, leaving his father alone in his home, the animal factor in his body is the dominate factor. The human factor of taking care of his father is constrained by his animal factor of surviving.

Many years later, after the death of his wife, Liz Wykys, he goes back to Putney to visit his father. This time, the relationship between him and his father is relaxed, not only because his wife advises him to make a compromise with his father (Chen Dieying 2017, 53)^[1], but also because he begins to understand his father after his conversations with his father. What's more, he finds that his father changes a lot, he drinks less and he is asked to the court fewer, therefore, he thinks he should have a more tolerant attitude towards his father and he takes care of father until his father's death. In this case, the human factor in his body is the dominate factor, which makes him remember his duty as a son, so he forgives his father and he looks after his father until his father's death. The animal factor of seeking revenge for the smallest grievance is restrained by his human factor of fulfilling his obligations as son requires.

In addition, the language Thomas Cromwell uses shows his identity and his terrible living conditions. After he was beaten by his father, he says 'I have got an eye under there, have I? Because it can't see anything' (Hilary Mantel 2010, 6)^[4]. From this sentence, we can see that he was hurt heavily by his father, he even doubts that he is blind, therefore, his father is not a kind father, his living conditions is very hard. Similarly, while he is in Kat's home, he says: 'I should. An hour from now he'll have had a skinful and he'll be back. He'd set the place on fire if he thought I were in it.' (Hilary Mantel 2010, 11)^[4] this sentence prove the cruelty of Walter Cromwell once again. The relationship between him and his father is extremely terrible, there are not like son and father, instead, they are like enemies. Besides, what Thomas Cromwell says shows that he is afraid of his father and he is not able to strike back. When Kat and Morgan ask him what sets Walter off, he says: 'Yesterday. I was fighting' (Hilary Mantel 2010, 7)^[4], later, from Kat's words, it is known that he fights with the boys down by the river, fighting and being beaten is a part of his childhood life, his childhood is full of blood and violence. Besides, while Morgan provides him with some money, he says 'I'll pay you back,' and 'I might go and be a soldier. I could send you a fraction of my pay and I might get loot' (Hilary Mantel 2010, 10)^[4]. From this, it is clear that he has no money, together with his introduction of being a blacksmith's son, it is a fact that his family is not rich and that his social status is low. Moreover, he is determined to go away to make a living, he might be a soldier or he might get loot. No matter being a soldier or getting loot, it requires no education, knowledge or skills. Since he has little knowledge or few skills; it means that his life after his leaving from his hometown can be very hard, if he wants to go further, he needs to study. All these words he says demonstrate that Cromwell has a clear understanding of his ethical identity as a blacksmith's son. His words helps to construct his ethical identity as the son of Walter(a blacksmith)--being poor and not being cultivated much, hit by his father often because his father also receives little education.

In conclusion, human factor and animal factor fight with each other in his body when he is a blacksmith's son. The animal factor makes his try his best to survive while the human factor make him never forget his ethical identity of being a son and fulfills his duty as a son. And the words he says helps to confirm and construct his ethical identity of being a blacksmith's son--being poor, having low social status and abused by his father.

3. The Servant for Thomas Wolsey

Now that Walter often abuses Cromwell, and even though Kat and Morgan Williams want to protect him, they have no capacity to protect him, Cromwell lives under a violent and horrible family environment when he was young. Moreover, in Putney, Walter has friends who can tell him when they see Cromwell, and at that time, the society has strict hierarchy, there is no law like protection of minors and the social welfare is still in its infancy, in order to survive, Cromwell runs away from Putney, when he was not fifteen. Later, things happened in 1527, when Thomas Cromwell is now a little over forty years old. What happened to Thomas Cromwell during these 27 years is not clear, but one thing for sure is that he serves Thomas Wolsey as a lawyer and consultant.

It is said that Thomas Cromwell knows the entire New Testament in Latin, so as a servant of the cardinal is apt- ready with a text if abbots flounder. His speech is assured. He can draft a contract, train a falcon, draw a map, stop a street fight, furnish a home and fix a jury. He will quote you a nice point in the old authors, from Plato to Plautus and back again (Hilary Mantel 2010, 31) ^[4]. From here, it is seen that Thomas Cromwell is almost capable of everything, he is proficient in the law, he is expert at delivering a speech and he does well in daily routines. Therefore, he has the ability to work for the cardinal, Wolsey, and he can offer good service as a lawyer and consultant.

As a servant, one should offer his service to his master. Therefore, the ethical identity of being a servant for Thomas Wolsey requires Thomas Cromwell to serve Wolsey as possible as he can. Just as Cromwell himself has defined, before the downfall of Wolsey, his job is to obey Wolsey's orders, give some advice for Wolsey and help Wolsey deal with things, but after the downfall of Wolsey, his job at this time, is to feed the cardinal information and soothe his temper and understand him and embellish his jokes (Hilary Mantel 2010, 76) ^[4]. Even though Wolsey falls down, Cromwell still remembers the debts he owes to Wolsey for being well understood and treated. So when the cardinal is at Esher, he is also at Esher with the cardinal, while Liz is ill and they are look for him, it is his belief that wherever the cardinal is, he will be there. In addition to it, he did many things for the cardinal after the downfall of the cardinal. For example, while the cardinal's servants are dismissed, he leaves some of his servants to take care of the cardinal. Even though he accepts the cardinal's advice to serve the king, he often writes letters to the cardinal to inform him of some information, he also pleads with the king, Henry VIII, to forgive the cardinal. While the king asks Cromwell how is, how is... (He seems reluctant to name the cardinal.) Cromwell answers that the cardinal cannot be well till he has your majesty's favor (Hilary Mantel 2010, 180) ^[4], which indicates that the cardinal's life is hard, and he still hopes the king can favor the cardinal. Later, when the king asks him what kinds of information he gets from the cardinal, he says the cardinal still remembers your majesty, and this shows that Cromwell wishes the king can remember the cardinal and can believe that the cardinal is loyal to him. In 1530, on epiphany feast, while the law students make a play about the cardinal--they make him flee from his palace at York place and they make the cardinal flounder in the mud at Putney--in order to make fun of the cardinal, he stops to say how was this allowed to go forward to some of these students and he let these students apologize. Despite that the cardinal falls from power, he does not allow anybody to laugh at him and put him to shame. Moreover, even though the cardinal falls from power, Cromwell does not betray him. While the queen, Katherine, says Wolsey is an enemy to her, Cromwell thinks that Wolsey is a father and a friend to him. While Anne Boleyn wants to be the queen of the king, he once again helps the cardinal, hoping Anne can realize the importance of the cardinal and say some good words about him in front of the king, hence, he tells Anne: the cardinal is the only man who can deliver a good verdict from the pope. He is the only man who can deliver the king's conscience, and deliver it clean (Hilary Mantel 2010, 202) ^[4]. In conclusion, no matter Wolsey has power or falls from power, Cromwell never betrays him, he tries his best to serve Wolsey, and he fulfills the responsibilities and duties his ethical identity as a servant for Wolsey requires. In this case, human factor is the dominate factor, making him serving Wolsey with all his heart, and it restrains the animal factor of abandoning a person when he is useless.

What's more, Thomas Wolsey treats Cromwell well, just like his father. Thomas Wolsey trusts him and believes that what is good for Cromwell is also good for himself, and vice versa. There are many conversations between Cromwell and Wolsey, which shows that Wolsey trusts Cromwell and thinks highly of him. The conversations between Cromwell and Wolsey or What Wolsey says helps Cromwell construct his ethical identity as Wolsey's servant, and this ethical identity make him serve as an advisor for Wolsey. He supports Wolsey, and he serves Wolsey pretty well.

Wolsey says: 'I shall bear that in mind, your time may come (Hilary Mantel 2010, 22) ^[4].' This shows that Wolsey bears Cromwell's life experience in his mind and he attempts to give Cromwell a

chance to fulfill himself, and he looks forward to Cromwell's future. While Cromwell talks about his life experience after he left Putney, Wolsey responds with the words that 'what will I do without you' (Hilary Mantel 2010, 98)^[4]. And also the cardinal says: Cromwell is 'my own good, trusty and most assured refuge in this my calamity', he is 'mine own entirely beloved Cromwell' (Hilary Mantel 2010, 217)^[4]. From here, it is clear that Cromwell plays an important role in Wolsey's life, Wolsey treats him like his son, he loves him, understands him and supports him. Apart from it, while Wolsey says 'The king called me this morning,' Cromwell responds with the words: 'What did he want?' Wolsey continues: 'Pity. And at such an hour....' Cromwell says 'If you cannot find him a son, you must find him a piece of sculpture. To ease his mind' (Hilary Mantel 2010, 23)^[4]. The conversation between Wolsey and Cromwell shows that when Wolsey has some difficulties, he will discuss it with Cromwell, or when something happens, he tends to talk about it with Cromwell and Cromwell will give some suggestions. Thomas Cromwell serves as an advisor for Wolsey.

While Cromwell serves the cardinal, the human factor in his body is the dominant factor, which always reminds him of the cardinal's kindness, enabling him to be loyal to the cardinal. However, after the downfall of Wolsey, the animal factor in his body is the dominant factor, which urges him to find a new master in order to survive. But even though, Cromwell does not betray Wolsey, the human factor restrains the animal factor of abandoning Wolsey because Wolsey is now useless to him. The human factor and animal factor balance each other.

4. The Courtier for Henry VIII

While Wolsey fails to deliver a good verdict from the pope, Henry VIII is extremely angry, he thinks it is the cardinal's fault that he cannot get divorced with Katherine successfully, and he believes that the cardinal is not competent for his job; the cardinal does not serve him loyally and the cardinal is against him, consequently, he regards the cardinal as his enemy and he confiscates all his possessions and powers, the cardinal is asked to go north. At this moment, Cromwell needs to find a new master to serve in order to live in the court.

In order to survive, in order to improve himself, Cromwell comes into contact with the duke of Norfolk, Anne's uncle. Norfolk hopes that Cromwell can work for him and he tells Cromwell that he will be a good lord to him (Hilary Mantel 2010, 162) ^[4]. And the duke of Norfolk promised to Cromwell that 'I spoke to the king for you and he is also content. You will take his instructions in the commons. And mine' (Hilary Mantel 2010, 163) ^[4]. Then, Cromwell begins to meet the king. The king asks him some information about the cardinal and the king asks his opinion about the war, which makes him astonished. Later, he is often with king, so rumors run all over Europe that Wolsey is about to be recalled. On 14 April 1532, the king appoints Cromwell Keeper of the Jewel House. Then, even though Gardiner is the secretary, Cromwell sees the king almost every day. He is more and more important to the king, he is running everything, including the weather. Later, Stephan Gardiner is sent back to France by Henry VIII. While Henry VIII has a conversation with De Selve, De Selve asks 'But who will do master secretary's job?' Henry answers 'Oh, Cromwell will do it. Won't you (Hilary Mantel 2010, 472) ^[4]? Therefore, Cromwell replaces Stephan Gardiner, becoming the new Master Secretary to Henry VIII. Then, while the post of Master of the Rolls is vacant, he becomes master of the rolls. Early in 1535, the king, Henry VIII gives Cromwell a new title on one has ever held before: Vicegerent in Spirituals, which means his deputy in church affairs (Hilary Mantel 2010, 608) ^[4]. During summer in 1536, Cromwell is promoted as Baron Cromwell by Henry VIII. Even though Thomas Cromwell's posts changes several times at court, he still works for the king. Therefore, his ethical identity as the courtier for Henry VIII is gradually formed as he works at court for the king.

As a courtier, one should offer his service to the king and be loyal to the king. Therefore, the ethical identity of being a courtier of Henry VIII requires Thomas Cromwell to serve the king with all his heart and loyally. He has studied Henry through his practice round (Hilary Mantel 2010, 253)^[4] and he knows Henry VIII very well, such as his temper, his interest, what he wants and what he needs. For example, while the king talks about the cardinal with him, as Henry VIII just says 'for god's sake, I wish someone would', then he is startled and he understands that Henry wants a conversation, or a topic (Hilary Mantel 2010, 219) ^[4], he actually knows what the king wants, the king does not want a conversation that has something to do with love, or hunting or war. Through some conversations between the king and Cromwell, it can be concluded that Cromwell does his job very well and Henry VIII is very satisfied with him. While the king meets Gardiner, he says 'we like Cromwell. Cromwell treats us very well (Hilary Mantel 2010, 540) ^[4].' When he thinks Gardiner turns him, he says to Cromwell that 'I hate disloyalty. That is why I value a man like you. You were good to your old master

in his trouble. Nothing could commend you more to me, than that (Hilary Mantel 2010, 541) ^[4]. That while the cardinal falls from power, Cromwell is still loyal to the cardinal makes Henry VIII have a reason to believe that Cromwell will also be loyal to him, and just because of this point, he trusts him and values him. Moreover, at one night, Henry VIII says ‘Cromwell, Cromwell, what shall I do?’ Cromwell, save me from the Emperor. Cromwell, save me from the Pope (Hilary Mantel 2013, 9-10) ^[3]. From this sentence, it is evident that the king attaches great importance to Cromwell, he considers Cromwell as a person who can help him out of the predicament, namely, be restricted by the Emperor and the Pope. What is of greater importance is that Cromwell himself is very loyal to the king. He swears to uphold the king’s authority, his pre-eminences, and his jurisdictions. And he swears to uphold his heirs and lawful successors (Hilary Mantel 2010, 282) ^[4]. He is not only faithful to the king, but also faithful to his dynasty. Not only is he loyal to the king, but he also asks his later generations to be faithful to the king, especially his son, Gregory. He tells Gregory to give way to the king’s requests, to open the way to his desire, and he says that is what a courtier does (Hilary Mantel 2010, 293) ^[4]. What’s more, he breaks the bishops and makes the king head of the church and takes away the revenues from the Holy Father and gives all these money to the king (Hilary Mantel 2010, 308) ^[4], so that the king himself can declare the law if he likes, he can get divorced with Katherine and he can marry Anne Boleyn, making her his queen. In conclusion, Cromwell is devoted to his duty; he tries his best to serve the king and the king also attaches great importance to him. Therefore, he fulfills the responsibilities and obligation his ethical identity as a courtier requires.

Moreover, the words Henry VIII says and the posts Henry VIII gives to Cromwell helps Cromwell construct his ethical identity as a courtier for Henry VIII. Henry VIII’s trust and confidence in Cromwell makes Cromwell remember the responsibilities and obligations his ethical identity as a courtier for Henry VIII requires. He tries his best to serve Henry VIII, helping him cope with difficulties he encounters and do things at his will.

While Cromwell serves the king, the animal factor and human factor in his body balance each other. The human factor makes him always remember his duty as a courier, so he is loyal to the king. The animal factor makes him ambitious, so that he can get promoted and he can survive better in the court.

5. Conclusion

As is known to all, one’s social identity is not fast and hard, it often varies. Our social identities maybe change because of the different stages of the life, the change of social circumstances and the change of our social life (Liu Weihong 2015, 147)^[2]. It is obvious that Thomas Cromwell’s ethical identity is not fixed, it is dynamic. At the first, he is the son of the blacksmith, Walter Cromwell; later, he is the servant for Wolsey; then, he becomes the courier for Henry VIII. And the change of his ethical identity also means that at different stages of his life, he lives under different ethical environment and he makes different ethical choices under these environments, while he makes different ethical choices, he demonstrate different combinations of sphinx factor in his body.

Moreover, as is universally known, language can express one’s identity, it can construct one’s identity, and vice versa, one’s identity has a great influence on one’s language. In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, it is seen that Cromwell’s ethical identity is partly constructed by some people’s words, like Stephan Gardiner, Thomas Wolsey, Henry VIII and so on. For instance, Thomas Cromwell’s father is an alcoholic and he is often fined by the court. Hence, Gardiner says Cromwell has a reprobate father and he is of low birth. Actually, Gardiner’s words reconfirm Cromwell’s ethical identity as the son of the blacksmith and make Cromwell have to pay attention to the fact of his low birth, which rankles with him all his life. While he works as a servant for Wolsey, Wolsey’s words like ‘what will I do without you’ help Cromwell construct his ethical identity as a servant for him. Even though he works for Wolsey with all his heart, if Wolsey does not recognize his identity of a servant for him, he needs to reconstruct his identity. While he works as a courtier for Henry VIII, Henry’s words like ‘I value you’, ‘save me from the Emperor, save me from the Pope’ help him realize his importance to the king, and thus help him construct his identity of being a courtier for Henry VIII. Besides, that many people call him ‘Master Cromwell’ also helps him reconfirm his identity of being a courtier to the king. Without these words, his ethical identity, especially the identity of being the servant for Wolsey and being the courtier for Henry VIII will not be constructed because these ethical identities are formed under special ethical environment, they can be gained or abandoned. Once the environment changes, his ethical identity will also change.

In conclusion, the change of Cromwell’s ethical identity shows that under different ethical

environments, he makes different ethical choices and his ethical identities also requires him to fulfill his obligations and duties. Moreover, it also shows that one's identity is not fixed, it is dynamic. The language will construct one's identity.

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