

# **The Children Act Study Guide**

## **The Children Act by Ian McEwan**

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# Plot Summary

Fiona Maye is a high court judge who works in the area of family law in London, England. In Chapter 1, Fiona's husband Jack – a university lecturer – startled her by requesting that Fiona give him her permission to have an extra-marital with a 28 year-old statistician called Melanie who Jack had met through work. Fiona was very angry about Jack's request and told him that she would not give her permission and that if he went ahead with the affair it would be the end of the marriage.

Jack and Fiona's argument was interrupted by Fiona's clerk, Nigel Pauling, who called to tell Fiona about an emergency case which would be brought before her in court the following day. A 17 year-old Jehovah's Witness was refusing a blood transfusion on religious grounds and the hospital where he was being treated were going to court to seek the right to force the boy to have a blood transfusion against his will, so that his life could be saved. Later, Fiona noticed Jack had left their shared apartment and was walking down the street with a suitcase.

In Chapter 2, Fiona reflected on the fact that her dedication to her career had meant that she and Jack had never had any children, which Fiona regretted. Once at work, Fiona called a locksmith and had the locks changed to her and Jack's apartment. Fiona heard the opposing arguments in the case of Adam Henry, the boy who was refusing a blood transfusion, and made the decision that she wanted to meet Adam before reaching her verdict.

In Chapter 3 Fiona visited Adam in hospital and the pair struck up an unlikely friendship. Adam read aloud some poetry he had written and played some music on his violin for Fiona. Fiona accompanied Adam on the violin by singing. Fiona returned to court where she delivered her verdict that Adam should have the blood transfusion. When Fiona returned home, Jack was waiting for her on their doorstep with his suitcase.

In Chapter 4, Fiona went to Newcastle, a city in the North of England, for work. Adam followed Fiona there. He told Fiona that he had lost his faith since his blood transfusion and asked her if he could come to live with her and Jack. Fiona refused and sent Adam away but before he left, they kissed.

In Chapter 5, Fiona worried that someone would find out about her kiss with Adam and that it would ruin her career. Adam sent Fiona a poem in which he compared Fiona to Satan. Fiona performed at a Christmas concert alongside a fellow legal professional and, just before she went on stage, she was informed that Adam had died. Adam's leukemia had returned and he had once again refused a blood transfusion but he was now 18 and there was nothing the law could do to stop him. Fiona expressed her grief about Adam's death to her husband Jack thereby re-establishing the emotional connection between the couple.



# Chapter 1

## Summary

In Chapter 1, Fiona Maye, a High Court judge, worked on the verdict for one of her recent cases at her home in London, England. As she was working, her husband Jack told her that he wanted to have an affair with a 28 year-old woman called Melanie who he worked with and asked Fiona for her permission to do so. Fiona was angered by the request and refused to agree to the suggestion. She told Jack that he could either stay in their marriage or have the affair but not both and that if he went ahead with his relationship with Melanie, Fiona would divorce him.

After Jack had left the room, Fiona recalled the details of the case she was working on in which a divorced Jewish couple disagreed about how their two daughters should be raised. The couple, the Bernsteins, was part of the Chareidi community of Orthodox Jews living in north London. Within this community, the author writes, women are expected to raise children and look after the family home. After the Bernsteins divorced, the mother went to university and began a career as a primary school teacher. It was argued in court, in front of Fiona, that this was a highly unusual thing for a Chareidi woman to do. The father feared that his daughters would be raised in a way which was not compatible with his faith because the mother wanted to send them to a school in which boys and girls were educated alongside each other, and she wanted them to stay on at school after the age of 16 and attend university if they wanted to, all of which the father was opposed to. The father accused the mother of removing the girls from their family and community, while the mother accused the father of wanting to deny them the chance to become well-educated and self-sufficient.

While considering her verdict, Fiona began to reflect on the argument she'd had with her husband Jack. Fiona forced herself to consider the case at hand instead of thinking about Melanie and she recalled the social worker who was always late and disorganized because of her family life but who had nevertheless produced an intelligent and incisive report in the Bernstein case.

Jack came back into the living room. Jack worked as a university lecturer and his proposal about Melanie made Fiona suspect that he had had affairs with his students in the past. Fiona asked Jack whether he had already begun his affair and he evaded the question. She told him if he had already begun the affair that she wanted him to pack a bag and leave immediately.

Fiona and Jack had no children of their own although they did have a large extended family of siblings, nieces, and nephews with whom they were very close. Fiona realized that she had become distant from Jack after a particularly distressing case involving conjoined twins in which Fiona's verdict had led to the death of one of the babies. One of the twins had functioning organs but the other did not. The twin with the functioning organs could not survive unless he was surgically removed from his brother, and the



other twin could not survive if he was surgically removed. The parents were Christians who believed that the decision about whether the boys should live or die must be left to God and were therefore opposed to any form of surgery. Fiona decided that the twins should be separated, one of them died, and the other survived.

The trauma of dealing with this case had left Fiona feeling uninterested in having sex with Jack. Jack accused Fiona of withdrawing from him without explaining why and used her behavior as justification for wanting to have an affair with Melanie. Their argument was interrupted by a phone call from Fiona's clerk, Nigel, informing her of an emergency case involving Jehovah's witnesses refusing medical attention for their son. While she was on the phone, Jack left the room. Fiona concluded her work on the Bernstein case, in which she found in favor of the mother. Fiona criticized the father for seeking to deny his daughters an education which could lead to a professional career whilst he himself was relying on the services of female solicitors, social workers, and a female judge.

Out of the window, Fiona noticed that Jack was leaving their apartment building with a suitcase. Fiona went to bed alone, woke up the next day, and got ready for work.

## Analysis

Chapter 1 immediately introduced the two key plot devices which will be used throughout the novel: the marital problems of Fiona and Jack and Fiona's involvement in cases featuring a dispute that is religious in nature.

Jack presented his proposal about having an affair with Melanie in a way which reflected the practices of law: he laid out his arguments in a rational way and expected Fiona to respond in a balanced and rational way rather than in an emotional or reactive way, despite the fact he was proposing having an affair with a younger woman. Fiona, however, was unable to respond in the detached and balanced manner which she uses at work when it came to matters which involved her personal life.

The stereotypical trope of the aging intellectual male having an affair with a younger woman after becoming bored with his long term marriage is not challenged or undermined in the novel. Jack made it clear to Fiona that he still loved Fiona and had no intention of leaving their marriage because of Melanie. Tellingly, the character of Melanie never features in the novel directly, only ever being referred to by Jack or Fiona in her absence. This means that there is no third perspective given on this affair to justify to the reader why this young professional woman would be interested in having an affair with an aging male academic who is looking for a bit of relief from the boredom of his marriage but who has no intention of leaving his wife. Melanie's motivations and feelings about the affair are clearly irrelevant to Jack and also appear to be irrelevant for the author who makes no attempt to introduce or explore this character despite her central importance as the main catalyst of the narrative.



Despite Fiona's job ostensibly involving family disputes of all kinds – divorce, custody disputes, abduction etc. – a disproportionate number of the cases described in the narration throughout the novel involve someone who is devoutly religious. In Chapter 1 the reader is introduced to four separate cases which involve some form of religious dispute and which represent Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. In each case Fiona will eventually rule against whichever side of the dispute is the most ardent in their religious belief.

The first case introduced is the case of the father from the Chareidi community of Orthodox Jews living in north London, England. Unlike the father, the mother in this case was less devout in her religion. Although she still sent her daughters to a Jewish school, she did not forbid them from socializing with members of the opposite sex, or with non-Jewish teenagers, and intended that the girls would be educated to university level despite this being frowned upon in the Chareidi community. No real attempt is made by the author, or by Fiona's character, to justify the view the father held that his daughters should be denied an education. The case is presented in a way which would naturally lead the reader to side with the mother and the father's stance is further undermined by the emphasis placed on the fact he has benefited from the services of professional women in court.

The next religious case mentioned is a woman who fears that the Muslim father of her child will remove the girl from the United Kingdom without the mother's permission. The descriptions of the two parents in this case mark one as religious and the other as not: the information given about the father focusses on his "strict Muslim" beliefs and his desire to live in the majority-Muslim country of Morocco. In contrast, the description of the mother makes no note of any religious affiliation simply stating that she was English and "highly educated." As the novel progresses, the author continues to present "highly educated" and "religious" as being mutually exclusive character traits. In the case of the Muslim man, the religious character is depicted as being worthy of suspicion and the potential cause of harm to a child.

The next religious case presented in the chapter involved a pair of conjoined twins, whose Christian parents opposed surgery to separate them because it would kill one of the boys. Fiona overruled the parents and allowed the hospital to separate the twins, saving one and killing the other. Fiona blamed this case for her emotional detachment from Jack, which Jack in turn blamed for his attempted fling with Melanie.

The last religious case introduced is the central legal case of the novel: the refusal of a family of Jehovah's witnesses to consent to their son receiving a blood transfusion. Through the two catalytic events in Chapter 1 – Jack's revelation about his desire to have an affair with Melanie, and the phone call which first introduced Fiona to Adam Henry – Fiona's life, career, and marriage will all be put to the test.

## Discussion Question 1

Is Jack's affair justified?



## Discussion Question 2

Do you think Fiona reached the right decision in the Bernstein case? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

How much importance does Fiona attach to her work life in comparison to her personal life?

## Vocabulary

recessed, lithograph, plaintive, querulous, assimilated, particularities, gaunt, contrary, jurisdiction, wrangles, statutes, provisions, premonition, ecstasy, proposition, solemn, sensual, assignations, disentangling, desolate, assent, diminishing, embittered, perdition, barrister



## Chapter 2

### Summary

In Chapter 2, Fiona went to work the day after her argument with her husband. As she walked to work in the rain she reflected on the reason that she and Jack had not had children: she had been so dedicated to her career which had kept her so busy that she didn't feel like she had time for children. Later, once she was older, she had started to regret not having any children and had investigated the possibility of adopting or having a surrogate but she didn't follow through on these plans because she was, once again, too busy with work.

Fiona thought that if she had had children they would have been helpful during her current argument with Jack and would have comforted her and talked sense into him.

When Fiona arrived at work her clerk Nigel informed her that a Moroccan Muslim man had removed his daughter from the United Kingdom despite having been forbidden from doing this by the court. Next, Nigel reminded Fiona about the Jehovah's Witness case which he had called her about the previous night.

Fiona called a locksmith and arranged to have the locks to her and Jack's home changed without informing Jack. Fiona bumped into her colleague Mr. Justice Sherwood Runcie, who Fiona disliked because he had once been involved in a miscarriage of justice in which a woman was mistakenly found guilty of murdering her children and was sent to prison.

Fiona went home and didn't see any signs that Jack had tried to get into their apartment since Fiona had had the locks changed. She reflected that she had three friends who she could phone to discuss her marital problems but decided not to. She played on her piano and thought about the upcoming Christmas concert at Gray's Inn, where she lived. She would perform alongside a barrister called Mark Berner.

The next day she returned to court to hear evidence in the Jehovah's Witness case. A 17 year-old boy, called Adam Henry, was suffering from leukemia and his doctors believed that he would have little chance of surviving the illness unless he was given a blood transfusion. However, Adam and his parents were strict Jehovah's witnesses, and they believed that having blood transfusions was against the wishes of God. The hospital was applying for a court order so that they could give Adam a blood transfusion against his wishes and against the wishes of his parents.

A doctor testified about why the transfusion was necessary and a legal representative for the counsel cross-examined him about the risks of blood transfusions. Next, Adam's father Kevin Henry was called to testify. The author emphasized Mr. Henry's working class background, his jobs as a laborer, and the fact that he had had a drinking problem





during the early years of his marriage and had been abusive towards his wife. Kevin explained that his life had improved after he became a Jehovah's Witness.

The family and their representatives argued that Adam was close to turning 18 and should therefore be treated like an adult. They argued that Adam's religious beliefs were sincerely held and that he was an intelligent and articulate teenager whose wishes about his own body should be respected. The hospital and their representatives argued that undue pressure was being placed on Adam by his parents and by the elders of his church who had threatened that Adam would be cast out of the community if he went against God's wishes by agreeing to have a blood transfusion. They further argued that he was legally still a child.

Fiona took a short break from the court during which she checked her phone and saw that Jack had not tried to contact her. She returned to court to hear the closing arguments and concluded that she wanted to meet Adam Henry in person before making her decision.

## Analysis

At the start of Chapter 2, the reader is given a different perspective on the failings of Fiona and Jack's marriage than was given in Chapter 1. In Chapter 1, the complaints focus on Jack's perspective and his feeling that he and Fiona don't have sex often enough which, Jack believed, justified his desire to have an extramarital affair. In Chapter 2, it was revealed that Fiona was also dissatisfied with their marriage, but for different reasons: she wished that they had had children.

In contrast to Jack's belief that the negative aspects of their marriage were Fiona's fault, not his own, Fiona placed the blame for her own dissatisfaction squarely on her own shoulders, rather than Jack's. There is no suggestion in Fiona's recollection about her failure to have children that she in any way held Jack responsible for their childlessness. Rather, she felt that the reason she had no children was that she had been too committed to the success of her career and that this commitment had distracted her from her desire to have children until it was too late. This rumination on her childlessness foreshadows her introduction to Adam Henry who becomes a surrogate son to Fiona, filling the perceived gap in her marriage just as Melanie the statistician filled the perceived gap from Jack's perspective.

When Fiona decided to have the locks to her apartment changed without telling Jack, it signaled that her rational and detached perspective was beginning to crack and she was behaving in an irrational and spiteful manner, similarly to the people upon whom she cast judgement during family court hearings. Fiona had no legal right to keep Jack from reentering their shared home, and knew this, but her legal knowledge was not able to outweigh the strength of her emotions.

Fiona reflected that she had three friends who she could have called in order to discuss her argument with Jack. Although reference is made in the novel to Fiona's friends, her



and Jack's mutual acquaintances, and their large extended family, none of these characters appear in the novel as characters with their own perspective or dialogue. This heightens the intensity of the relationships between Fiona and Adam and Fiona and Jack due to the claustrophobic atmosphere created by the absence of other relationships.

Hearing the arguments in the case of Adam Henry is a major turning point in the novel which will shake up Fiona's whole world. Many readers, especially those who are not from a devout religious background, would initially respond to the case of Adam Henry as if it is straightforward: the boy will die without the blood transfusion, so he should not be allowed to refuse it. Chapter 2 makes a balanced and compelling case for why the situation is not straightforward. The most central argument is how close Adam is to the age of 18 which is the legal age of majority in the United Kingdom. It is an accepted human right that adults should be able to refuse medical treatment if they so wish, so the fact that Adam was threatened with being denied these rights when he was only months away from legally being an adult was central to the argument in favor of allowing him to make up his own mind. The representatives of the family also made arguments about the potential dangers of blood transfusion in terms of communicable diseases and suggested that modern medicine had become overly reliant on blood transfusions in situations where they are not always strictly necessary.

Adam's father, Kevin Henry, is used to introduce one of the novel's central themes: the British Class System. Kevin is characterized as working class: much is made of his impressive skill as a laborer, but there are other more stereotypical characterizations at work in this chapter such as the focus on alcoholism and domestic abuse which are often used as stereotypes for working class men in the U.K. As the novel progresses, Fiona's upper-middle class status is consistently challenged, as the limits of her perspective and worldview are revealed.

Religion is presented as a positive force in Kevin Henry's life because it saved him from alcoholism and prevented him from continuing to be abusive towards his wife. However, religion is also depicted in a negative sense, as the religious character in this Chapter is depicted as less educated than the non-religious characters.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why did Fiona blame her own career for her childlessness, rather than Jack's?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why did Fiona have the locks to her apartment changed?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What motivated Fiona to visit Adam in the hospital?



## Vocabulary

briskly, partita, crests, resolute, variability, vigorously, undeterred, latterly, elevated, grievances, splendor, indiscriminately, inevitable, habitual, counterpoint, dissonances, pupillage, prestigious, receded, precociously, gravids, rueful, surrogate, allegiance, etiolated



# Chapter 3

## Summary

In Chapter 3, Fiona visited Adam in hospital. During her taxi ride from the court to the hospital she travelled through districts of South London with which she was not familiar and snobbishly reflected that she couldn't understand why people made their lives there. She remembered a time when she was a teenager when she had been admitted to hospital after an accident on her bicycle. When she was in hospital the pediatric ward was full which meant she was admitted to an adult ward. The women there were very kind to Fiona and it meant that Fiona has always thought of hospitals as happy places.

Fiona arrived at the hospital along with the social worker for Adam's case, Marina Greene. When they arrived at the ward where Adam was staying Fiona was introduced to two nurses one of whom was Filipina and the other Caribbean. The author describes the social worker as becoming very animated when she saw the nurses and behaving, in the author's words, like "an animated black woman in a white skin." The Caribbean nurse made it clear to Fiona that she was also a Christian but that she did not believe that God wanted Adam to die because of refusing a blood transfusion.

Fiona went into Adam's hospital room and he immediately began talking to her at great length and speed about chemistry, religion, poetry, and the violin. Adam quickly exhausted himself and had to lie back in his bed to recover his breath. Fiona started to question Adam about his leukemia and how he felt about his illness. Adam accused Fiona of coming to the hospital to try to change his mind but Fiona insisted that wasn't true. Fiona checked that Adam understood that with the blood transfusion he would have a very good chance of recovery and without it he was likely to die. He said he understood. Next Fiona did something which she felt overstepped the legal mark by asking him if he had considered a third possibility: that by refusing the blood transfusion he might live but suffer from a severe disability for the rest of his life, such as blindness, brain damage, or non-functioning kidneys. Adam became very upset by this suggestion but insisted that he would have to accept whatever happened to him as it would reflect God's will. Their conversation was interrupted by a nurse doing her routine checks.

After the nurse left, Fiona changed her line of questioning and asked Adam about the poetry he'd been writing. Adam was very keen to talk about this and read one of his poems aloud to Fiona. Fiona and Adam discussed the merits of his poem. Before Fiona left, she asked Adam to show her his violin. Adam played a tune that Fiona knew well from her Christmas performances with Mark Berner at Gray's Inn. When he finished playing it Fiona and Marina the social worker both applauded. Fiona asked Adam to play it again and this time she sang along with him. Adam enjoyed playing music with Fiona so much that he asked if they could do it again, but Fiona insisted that it was time for her to return to court.



Back at the court, Fiona delivered her verdict in Adam's case. She accepted the argument that Adam was an intelligent and articulate young man who knew his own mind and whose religious beliefs were sincerely held. She also acknowledged that he was very near to being legally an adult. In reaching her verdict she referred to Section 1 (a) of the Children Act (1989) which states that "When a court determines any question with respect to ... the upbringing of a child --- the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount decision," a quotation which was used as the epigraph for the novel. Fiona argued that allowing Adam to die as a result of not having a blood transfusion could not be considered to be the best decision for his welfare. For this reason Fiona ruled that the hospital were permitted to force Adam to have a blood transfusion against his wishes.

Later that night, Fiona returned to her apartment at Gray's Inn where she discovered Jack waiting on their doorstep with his suitcase. Jack apologized for leaving and said he had not gone ahead with his affair with Melanie but continued to partly blame Fiona for their current situation. Fiona told him to sleep in the spare room and went to bed.

## Analysis

Chapter 3 further develops the novel's interest in the British class system. Fiona's job meant she was regularly charged with making important decisions on behalf of other people, but the opening sections of Chapter 3 began to reveal that Fiona's perspective was limited and was lacking in understanding and compassion from people who had lived different lives to her own. When Fiona travelled via taxi from the court to the hospital she passed through a region of London with which she was not familiar, despite having lived in the city for the whole of her life. Fiona has spent her whole life closeted away from the realities of poverty in her nation's capital and is so detached from the suffering of poor Londoners that she looks down on them for living in unpleasant districts, rather than reflecting that their poverty means they are unable to afford to live in the moneyed surroundings of Gray's Inn, where Fiona has made her life.

The author underscores this perception of Fiona as someone who had no understanding of other people's suffering through the anecdote about Fiona's time in hospital as a teenager. Hospitals are the location of traumatic and harrowing life events for the majority of people who are required to frequent them as patients, but because Fiona personally enjoyed the one time she ever had to stay in hospital, she thinks of them as happy locations. Her own unusually privileged experiences alter her view in such a way that it makes her disconnected from the experience of ordinary people. This is a dangerous character trait for a judge, who is allowed by law to make decisions on behalf of other people even when she lacks basic understanding of the realities of their lives and suffering.

Once Fiona arrived at the hospital her detachment from the lives of less wealthy people was once again highlighted by how stiff and formal Fiona was with the nursing staff in comparison to the social worker Marina Greene, who was much more comfortable in this environment. Religion is characterized as something that is removed from Fiona's



world in this scene because the author associates it with people of color, whereas Fiona, who is not religious, is white. The Caribbean nurse had less strict views on Christianity than the Henry family, which demonstrated that not all religious people hold precisely the same beliefs. However the scene also featured racial stereotyping when it was implied that black women are inherently more outgoing and animated than white women, when the author described the white social worker as “an animated black woman in a white skin.”

Fiona’s relationship with Adam is grounded in their shared love of music and poetry. Adam’s religion has kept him isolated from the rest of society in a similar way to the way Fiona’s career and class have kept her isolated. Both of them were detached from the wider world and discovered a kindred spirit in each other. Fiona’s fear that Marina Greene would think she was unprofessional for singing with Adam foreshadows her fear later in the novel that someone saw her kissing Adam. In both instances, her fear is that her relationship with this boy will damage, or even destroy, her career. This practical real-world fear echoes Fiona’s core emotional fear that her pursuit of professional success has destroyed her chance to have children.

When Fiona delivered her verdict that Adam must be forced to undergo a blood transfusion, she set in motion a course of events which will forever alter both of the characters’ lives. Although Adam was devoutly and sincerely committed to his religion when he first met Fiona, her actions in this chapter will cause him to have serious doubts about his faith. Fiona made a decision in this chapter which will have severe ramifications for Adam Henry but, later in the novel, Fiona will hide behind her professionalism rather than take responsibility for her role in his life.

When Jack returned to their shared apartment, he had no way of knowing the dramatic change which had occurred in Fiona’s life since he left her to be with Melanie. It will not be until the final chapter that Fiona reveals to Jack the profound effect that Adam Henry has had on her life. In his absence, Fiona has realized that she is more distraught about the absence of children in her life than she is about Jack’s absence. Jack’s attempted infidelity has revealed a wound to Fiona that his return cannot heal.

## **Discussion Question 1**

In what ways is Adam Henry different to a teenager who hasn't had a strict religious upbringing?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What role does Marina Greene play in the novel?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Do you think Adam should have been allowed to refuse the blood transfusion? Why?

## Vocabulary

intimate, secular, desultory, oblivious, compulsion, desolation, tainted, recoiled, indulged, induced, gallop, disdain, interspersed, remote, enveloping, misanthropy, hierarchies, retrospect, ailments, hysterectomies, raucously, eminent, cladding, prejudicial, atrium



# Chapter 4

## Summary

In Chapter 4, Fiona continued her work as a high court judge over the summer of 2012 and felt as if she was obliged to deal with more cases of marital discord than usual. Although Jack had moved back into their home, the couple continued to argue. Jack apologized for his behavior but also accused Fiona of isolating him, being cold, and losing her sense of fun. These accusations bothered Fiona because she feared they were true. They avoided interacting with each other through work and by staying in separate rooms in their apartment. Fiona feared that, although Jack had not had sex with Melanie, he would now pursue an affair with someone else.

The eight year old twin daughters of one of Jack's nieces came to stay with Fiona and Jack for a weekend, which took the couple's minds off their disagreements. Their presence made Fiona feel sad, especially when she noticed how good Jack was with the children.

After the weekend, Fiona returned to work, where she discovered a letter from Adam Henry. In his letter Adam explained to Fiona that he had lost his faith. When Fiona ruled that he must be forced to have the blood transfusion against his will, Adam was very angry with her. But he soon noticed that his parents were very happy and crying tears of joy. This struck Adam as hypocrisy. They had not broken God's orders because they had stood firm by refusing the transfusion, but Adam's life was saved because the decision was taken out of their hands by the courts: the family was having their cake and eating it. Adam told Fiona that he daydreamed about the two of them going on a round-the-world cruise together, talking all day. Adam concluded his letter by asking Fiona to write back to him.

Fiona wrote a few different drafts of a reply to Adam's letter but decided not to send it. Fiona latest job at work was to travel around the country hearing cases in different locations which would otherwise have to be heard in London. Fiona's first stop on this trip was her favorite English city: Newcastle upon Tyne, in the North East of England. Before setting off for Newcastle, Fiona received a second letter from Adam, this one delivered directly to her home with only her name and no address on the envelope, which indicated that Adam had been there in person to deliver it. In the letter Adam told Fiona that he had been having a lot of arguments with his parents, that he'd seen Fiona on the street but wasn't brave enough to talk to her, and that he hoped she would reply to his letter this time.

A week later, on the morning Fiona was due to leave for Newcastle, Jack made her a morning coffee: a gesture he had not made since before the beginning of their marital discord.





Once in Newcastle, Fiona reflected on her teenage visits to the city to stay with her aunt, uncle, and cousins who were very wealthy despite living in one of the historically poorest parts of the country. Fiona recalled that her time in Newcastle was the only time in her life when she was carefree, daring, and had fun. After hearing several cases in the family court on the Newcastle Quayside, Fiona retired to an historic manor house, Leadman Hall, where visiting judges stayed. The weather was cold and stormy. That night, Fiona had dinner in Leadman Hall with another visiting judge, Caradoc Ball and three of his business associates. Their dinner was interrupted by Fiona's assistant Nigel who called her out of the room, where he informed her that Adam Henry had followed her to Newcastle and was in the building.

Fiona agreed to see Adam, who was drenched from walking in the rain. Adam explained that he had left home due to his arguments with his parents and he was planning to stay with a relative in Birmingham. Adam told Fiona that he'd read her judgement on his case and saw that she'd said she wanted to protect him from his religion. Adam said that she'd succeeded in doing that and she has saved his life. Fiona asked Adam why he had followed her to Newcastle and he replied that he wanted to ask her if he could come to live with her as a lodger. Fiona told him that wasn't possible and had Nigel arrange for a taxi to take Adam away to a hotel for the night and to buy him a train ticket to Birmingham in the morning.

Before Adam left to get into his taxi he kissed Fiona on the lips and she didn't try to stop him. Fiona told Adam that he had to leave and he sullenly got into his taxi.

## Analysis

In Chapter 4, Fiona began to see reflections of her internal emotional turmoil in the external experiences of the real world, as she felt that there were considerably more cases of broken marriages being brought before her in court than usual. This shows Fiona using her job to process her emotions: rather than fully engage with her emotional struggle to mend her relationship with Jack, Fiona rededicated herself to her career and focused on her job. However, this focus could not fully distract her from her own emotional suffering, and she began to see reflections of her personal life appearing in her professional life.

During the passage of narration when Fiona reflected on the number of divorce cases she heard that summer she briefly reflected on some more disturbing criminal cases involving child abuse and severe neglect. This serves to remind the reader of how detached Fiona is from the suffering of others: although the breakdown of her marriage is difficult for Fiona herself, it is nothing in comparison to the suffering of the families caught up in the harrowing criminal cases which Fiona presided over during the summer of 2012.

The visit from Jack's nieces underscores Fiona's central dissatisfaction with their marriage: she wished that they had had children. This is made even more painful by the fact that Jack was very good with children and clearly enjoyed spending time with his



nieces: it was not Jack's fault that they had not had children and Fiona blamed herself for the state of unhappiness that not having children had caused her. At this stage, Jack still believed that it was their sex life and his attempted affair with Melanie which was putting their marriage under strain and had no idea that the absence of children was what was truly bothering Fiona.

The visit from the nieces put the topic of children on Fiona's mind when she returned to work and received the first letter from Adam Henry. Adam's letter about losing his faith after his blood transfusion demonstrated the profound impact that Fiona had had on his life. However, Fiona did not take responsibility for the effect she'd had, instead choosing to hide behind her professional authority rather than engage Adam in any further discussion about the nature of religion. In making her verdict that Adam should be forced to have the blood transfusion against his will, Fiona made the argument that she was helping to save and protect him from his religion. Fiona's actions took away from Adam the only system of knowledge and understanding that he had access to without giving any thought to how this young man would be able to process the world in the aftermath of the blood transfusion.

For Fiona, the city of Newcastle in the North East of England is the symbol of a different life path which she could have followed, one in which she was more carefree and more fun. This is significant because one of the main accusations leveled against Fiona by Jack was that she had lost her sense of fun. For Fiona, Newcastle is the location where she is able to have fun and detach from the ambitious and professional side of her personality. Fiona looked back on her time as a teenager visiting family in Newcastle as the last time she had truly been carefree and not focused on her career.

The location of Newcastle also furthers the novel's depiction of class: although Newcastle is in historically one of the poorer regions of the United Kingdom, the author states that the family Fiona visited while she was there were the richest people she had ever known. This further underscores Fiona's detachment from the concerns of ordinary people: even when visiting somewhere that is wildly different to her own background, she is still surrounded by unusual wealth and sheltered from the realities of poverty in the country. This perception is further underscored by the lavish and old-fashioned manor house where Fiona stays when she visits Newcastle in the present day which has antiquated staff members such as butlers and house keepers.

Adam's behavior in following Fiona could have been interpreted as dangerous or criminal so her willingness to meet with someone who had stalked her after she had ruled on his case demonstrated that Fiona felt an emotional connection with Adam and trusted that he did not wish to harm her. Their interaction at Leadman Hall can retrospectively be seen as a cry for help from Adam who had been left stranded in the world after losing his religion. His religion had provided all of the structure for his life and without it Adam felt lost. He turned to Fiona to help him make sense of the new world he found himself in but, despite their strong emotional bond, Fiona insisted on maintaining a professional rather than personal attitude towards Adam.



The kiss introduced ambiguity into Fiona and Adam's relationship. Because Fiona was so preoccupied with the absence of children in her marriage with Jack, the reader had been led to believe that her interest in Adam was maternal. The kiss put a question mark over her motivations and raised the question of whether Fiona was also looking for a younger person with whom she could have an affair, like Jack had attempted with Melanie.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What associations does the city of Newcastle have for Fiona?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why did Adam lose his faith?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What motivated Adam to follow Fiona to Newcastle?

## **Vocabulary**

artful, combatants, counsel, delusion, pretext, maneuvering, psychotic, idle, kitsch, discharged, diminish, reiterated, brooded, confer, terse, radioactive, conciliatory, evasive, morose, dismal, constraints, disentanglement, recede, whorls, swooping



# Chapter 5

## Summary

In Chapter 5, Fiona left Newcastle about a week after Adam came to see her at Leadman Hall. In the car on her way out of the city she became panic stricken over her kiss with Adam and imagined that if anyone had seen them the resulting scandal could ruin her career. In order to distract herself from these fears, Fiona called Jack and suggested he make a reservation for dinner at a nearby restaurant that they both liked for the night that she would return home.

Two weeks later Fiona returned to London from her trip around the North of England and went to the restaurant for dinner with Jack. Towards the end of the meal they struggled to come up with neutral conversation topics and the atmosphere became awkward. Jack started to give Fiona an in-depth account of a geology lecture he had attended the previous night, which Fiona found depressing. She suggested they should get the bill.

The tension between Jack and Fiona subsided but they were not fully reconciled. They began to eat meals at home together again and accepted some invitations from friends to socialize as a couple. But Jack continued to sleep in the spare bedroom and when their 19 year old-nephew came to stay, the nephew was given the spare room and Jack slept on the sofa in the living room.

As autumn progressed, Fiona began rehearsals with Mark Berner for their performance at the Gray's Inn Christmas concert. Whilst rehearsing for the Christmas concert, Mark told Fiona the details of a criminal case he had been working on in which his client had been sentenced to three years in jail. Mark believed that the fate of his client – who had once been falsely accused of rape and served time in prison as a result - was evidence of a class war going on in the United Kingdom.

In late October, Fiona received another letter from Adam. In it was a poem he had written about the kiss he shared with Fiona while they were together in Newcastle called "The Ballad of Adam Henry." The poem implied that Adam believed Fiona had been sent by Satan to tempt him away from God's path. The final verse was crossed out and featured many re-writes and lines written over each other. Because of this, Fiona was unable to decipher the words of the final verse. Fiona decided it would be kinder not to reply to the letter because it would only encourage Adam to contact her again. She thought if she ignored him, he would forget about her and move on.

In December, on the day of the Christmas concert, Fiona dressed up in a black silk dress and high-heeled shoes. Jack surprised her with a bottle of champagne and candles in the living room before they left. He put some jazz music on the record player, which reminded Fiona of when they had first met. Jack told Fiona that she looked beautiful and they kissed.



Jack and Fiona went to the concert venue together. Moments before going on stage, Sherwood Runcie took Fiona aside to tell her some news but the reader is not informed what he said. Fiona and Mark performed brilliantly and the crowd was wildly enthusiastic in their applause. The pair performed an encore but instead of playing the piece they agreed upon, Fiona began to play the piece she played with Adam the first time they met in the hospital. Mark went along with it and the end of the performance was greeted with a standing ovation. Instead of soaking up the applause alongside Mark, Fiona quickly left the stage.

Fiona returned to her apartment where she called the social worker, Marina Greene, who she had worked with on Adam's case. Marina confirmed what Sherwood Runcie had told Fiona: Adam's leukemia had come back and he was readmitted to the hospital. The doctors wanted to give Adam another blood transfusion and he had once again refused. However, because he was now 18, there was nothing anyone could do to prevent him from refusing treatment and Adam died.

Fiona re-read the poem that Adam had sent to her in October and this time was able to decipher the last verse which included lines which, Fiona now realized, revealed Adam's intention to commit suicide.

Jack returned to the apartment and praised Fiona for her performance in the concert. Fiona broke down in tears and told him about Adam. Hypocritically, Jack was angry about her relationship with Adam and demanded to know if Fiona had been in love with him. Fiona exclaimed that Adam was just a child, a lovely boy, and broke down in tears. She went to their bedroom alone and sobbed herself to sleep. When she woke up, Jack was by her side and she thanked him for being there.

## Analysis

When Fiona left Newcastle she was obsessed with the idea that her kiss with Adam would somehow lead to her career being ruined. Later in the chapter, she acknowledges that this was an irrational fear because Fiona was no longer involved with Adam in a legal capacity by the time the kiss occurred and he was also legally an adult by the time they kissed. This fear is a reflection of Fiona's core fears about her lack of children. She has avoided having a family because she feared that the children would ruin her career or prevent her from achieving the level of professional success which she desired. When she encountered someone later in life who could have functioned as a surrogate child for her and Jack she once again pushed aside the opportunity of raising a child for fear that it would damage her career.

After Fiona pushed Adam away, however, it led to the improvement of her relationship with Jack. Whilst trying to distract herself from her fears about her kiss with Adam, Fiona called Jack and arranged to have dinner with him. Her fears about Adam directly motivated her to return to the safety of her marriage with Jack. Although the dinner together was awkward it marked a key turning point in their reconciliation.



When Fiona received the final letter from Adam she failed to realize its significance because of her lack of understanding of people from a different background. Fiona imagined that Adam would outgrow his childish attachment to her when he went to university in the same way that Fiona had outgrown her attachment to Newcastle and her desire to become a Geordie, one of the locals, once she had passed on from her teenage years. However Adam and Fiona were from very different backgrounds and Fiona failed to take this into account when she predicted to herself what Adam's likely future would be. She failed to imagine how traumatizing it would be for Adam to try to function in a world without his religion when his religion had previously defined everything in his life. Because Fiona herself was not brought up in such devoutly religious circumstances she does not comprehend how difficult it will be for Adam when that structure is taken away from him and therefore doesn't see the risks that are presented in Adam's poem.

The case of Mark Berner's client furthers the discussion of the British class system in the novel when Mark explicitly announced that he believed the legal system in the U.K. was evidence of a class war going on in the country in which working class men are disproportionately imprisoned due to their lack of access to the money needed to hire good legal counsel. Mark argues that working class men are stereotyped as criminals and are given much harsher sentences than would be given to upper class men involved in similar crimes. Mark specifically mentioned the Bullingdon Club from Oxford University which famously counted current U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron as a member and which was often accused of illegal activities such as vandalism and anti-social behavior. The case that Mark referred to involved a false rape allegation which led to his client being imprisoned despite his innocence, which is a statistically rare occurrence as very few rape investigations in the United Kingdom result in prison time, with only 5.7% of reported rape cases ending in a conviction for the accused.

When Fiona dressed up for the Christmas concert in a black silk dress and high-heeled shoes it symbolized her desire to reembrace the fun side of her personality and to once again devote time to being sexually attractive to Jack. Jack responded positively to Fiona's efforts to improve her appearance and the interlude before the Christmas concert made it look as if the couple were on the verge of completing their reconciliation by reigniting their sexual relationship. Although the novel opened with Jack's complaints about their sex life, and his proposed affair which threatened to end their marriage, by the final chapter the reader is aware that this is not the only issue which is haunting Jack and Fiona's marriage.

While Jack is dissatisfied with the sexual side of their marriage, Fiona is dissatisfied because they don't have any children. Their interaction before the Christmas concert demonstrated that the sexual side of their relationship was on the verge of being fully healed, but their marriage as a whole cannot be properly healed until Fiona communicates to Jack her grief about her childlessness. The full weight of Fiona's grief over her childlessness hit her at the Christmas concert when Sherwood Runcie informed of Adam's death and this is the breakthrough that is needed for Fiona to finally be emotionally open with Jack, paving the way for a full reconciliation from the estrangement which began in the first chapter.



As a judge, and therefore a representative of the secular world, Fiona failed to offer Adam a suitable alternative to his religious upbringing by turning him away in his hour of need. The message of the novel, then, is that it is not enough for atheists and agnostics to criticize the behavior of the devoutly religious: they must also provide alternative views of the world and ways of living which can provide the structure and meaning that young people like Adam seek out when they begin to lose their faith.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What is the significance of the Christmas concert?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why was Jack angry when Fiona first told him about Adam?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Did Adam commit suicide?

## **Vocabulary**

pending, embittered, meagre, exemplary, uniformly, interludes, impulsive, folly, disgrace, unconstrained, tribal, transgression, unscathed, hesitant, tentative, acoustic, muted, improvise, congested, dispensed, warily, delicacy, recrimination, punitively, paramount



# Characters

## Fiona Maye

Fiona Maye is the central character/protagonist. She is a high court judge in her sixties who works in the area of family law. At the start of the novel, while reviewing her judgement on a recent case, Fiona was confronted by her husband about his desire to have an affair with a younger woman. Later the same night, Fiona was informed of a case involving a young Jehovah's Witness, Adam Henry, who was refusing to have a blood transfusion. These two events serve as dual catalysts in Fiona's life. On the surface it appears as if the two catalysts will affect two separate spheres of Fiona's life: Jack's intended affair will affect her personal life and Adam's case will affect her work life. However, as the story progresses, each situation crosses over and begins to affect the other sphere of Fiona's life.

The central problem for Fiona's character is that she has been so focused on her career throughout her life that she didn't ever have any children with Jack. Jack's central complaint about his marriage with Fiona is that they don't have sex often enough, but this is not depicted as being a problem for Fiona except that it prompted her husband to have an affair. It could be argued that it is Fiona's repressed desire to have children that functions as the real, subconscious, sub-textual catalyst in the novel whereas Jack's affair and Adam Henry's court case function as the conscious real-world practical catalysts which bring the subconscious catalyst out into the open. Fiona thought that the reason she withdrew from Jack sexually and emotionally was because of the trauma of dealing with a case of two newborn babies who were conjoined twins: a case in which Fiona's judgement led to the death of one of the babies. A case involving babies provoked such a strong reaction in Fiona because of her attempts to deny her own grief about her lack of children. This grief led to Fiona's sexual withdrawal from Jack and prompted Jack to announce his intention to have an extra-marital affair with a younger woman.

Fiona's job involved her being rational and detached but the turmoil of the trouble in her marriage caused Fiona to behave in increasingly emotional and irrational ways, such as having the locks changed without informing Jack. It was Fiona's distressed emotional state which prompted her to visit Adam Henry in hospital rather than dealing with the case in a court of law, as she would do under normal circumstances.

By the end of the novel Fiona admitted her repressed desire to have children and was finally able to grieve for the family which she never had, which she does by grieving over the death of Adam Henry. She admitted to Jack that that her grief over Adam's death was because he was such a lovely boy, rather than because of any romantic or sexual interest in him. This paved the way for her to admit to Jack that her disconnection from their marriage was caused by her grief over her lack of children, reconnecting the emotional bond between her and Jack, allowing them to heal their broken marriage.





## Adam Henry

Adam Henry is a 17 year-old Jehovah's Witness suffering from leukemia. He serves the role of the catalyst in the narrative and functions as a surrogate son for Fiona, who has no children of her own. Adam has been raised as a Jehovah's Witness for his entire life, unlike his parents who made the decision to become Jehovah's witnesses when they were adults. Although Adam is depicted stalking a high court judge, which would be considered dangerous and illegal in real life, he is treated by other characters in the novel as harmless. This underscores the naivety of his character and his childlike behavior which in turn justifies Fiona's decision to treat him as a child when she forced him to have a blood transfusion against his wishes.

Adam has led a very sheltered life and he has little knowledge of the world outside of his strict religious upbringing. When Fiona met Adam she noticed the ways his sheltered upbringing had had positive and negative effects. On the negative side, Adam's devout religious background had convinced him to turn down a life-saving medical procedure. Later in the novel, Adam admitted that he thought this was foolish behavior in retrospect. On the positive side, Adam has been sheltered from some of the normal concerns of teenagers and therefore did not develop the kind of grouchy, distant, closed-off attitude that many young people adopt during their teenage years as a way of coping with the difficulties of adolescent life. Adam's immaturity and open enthusiasm charmed Fiona.

Adam underwent a crisis in his religious faith after Fiona made the decision to force him to have a blood transfusion against his wishes and against the wishes of his family. After Adam's life was saved by Fiona's actions, Adam realized that his parents were very happy and grateful that he had not died. This struck Adam as hypocrisy. His parents wanted him to refuse the blood transfusion for their own selfish reasons: they did not want to be seen to be going against the wishes of God. However when Adam was forced by Fiona to go against their perception of God's wishes his parents were not upset but were overjoyed: they were pleased that they did not have to break the rules themselves but were still happy to receive the benefits of going against God's wishes. Fiona's judgement allowed them to have their cake and eat it.

This hypocrisy led Adam to question everything he had been taught about his religion and his questions motivated him to reach out to Fiona, the woman who had helped him see through his parents' hypocrisy. However, because Fiona turned away Adam's attempts to form a relationship with her, Adam was left without any source of guidance or meaning in his life to replace the role that religion had previously played. Because Fiona did not step up to her role as surrogate parent to Adam, Adam failed to find meaning in his new atheist life and committed suicide by refusing another blood transfusion.



## Jack Maye

Jack Maye is Fiona's husband. He is 60 years old and works as a university lecturer. In contrast to Fiona, Jack's career is never depicted as a negative force in his life or in his marriage nor is it held up as one of the reasons that the couple never had any children. Jack was dissatisfied with his sex life in his marriage and proposed to Fiona that he should be permitted to have an affair with a 28 year-old statistician named Melanie who Jack met through work. However when Jack did leave Fiona to be with Melanie he claimed that he had second thoughts and realized he was foolish to risk his relationship with Fiona for the sake of a fling with a woman he hardly knew. Because the novel is told entirely from Fiona's perspective the reader is never given any insight into the relationship between Jack and Melanie, other than the details that Jack chose to share with Fiona. Because of this an element of doubt exists about whether Jack told the truth about not going through with his affair with Melanie.

Jack used the language of the law against Fiona by trying to present his argument in a rational and pragmatic way rather than acknowledging the emotional nature of his request. Jack is revealed as a hypocrite in the final chapter of the novel when he became angered by the thought that Fiona had had an affair with Adam Henry, holding Fiona to a double standard by believing his own desire for an affair was sensible and understandable, but becoming emotional and irrational when apparently confronted by the same behavior in his wife.

## Melanie

Melanie is a 28 year-old statistician who is a colleague of Jack Maye. Jack wanted to have an affair with Melanie but did not want to do so behind his wife's back, so he asked Fiona for her permission. No attempt is made by the author to explain Melanie's motivation in becoming involved in this affair.

Despite playing a prominent catalytic role in the novel, Melanie never features in the narrative directly. She is only ever referred to by Jack or Fiona. Fiona recalls an occasion when she met Melanie and she is described in the narration as "a silent young woman with heavy amber beads and a taste for the kind of stilettos that could wreck an old oak floor." Describing Melanie as silent is a reference to her characters silent function in the novel. The stilettos are a symbol of her sex appeal and the potential damage her sex appeal will do to the "old oak floor" of Jack and Fiona's marriage.

## Nigel Pauling

Nigel Pauling is Fiona's clerk. He functions as both a confidante and a danger. Nigel takes care of Fiona at work: keeping her up to date with what's happening in her cases, bringing her lunch to the office, and arranging a taxi and a hotel for Adam Henry when he followed Fiona to Newcastle. Pauling is the opposite of Fiona in the sense that it is Fiona's job to make judgements, but Pauling's job to follow orders. When Adam arrived



at the manor house in Newcastle, Pauling did not offer an opinion or behave in a judgmental way, instead simply following Fiona's instructions. However, his role is not only supportive but also threatening. Few people have such intimate knowledge of Fiona's activities and emotional state and, after Fiona and Adam kiss, Fiona is wracked with paranoia that someone such as Pauling may have seen them.

## Kevin Henry

Kevin Henry is Adam Henry's father. Unlike Adam, Kevin did not grow up as a Jehovah's Witness: he became one later in life as a way of dealing with his alcohol problem and his abusive behavior towards his wife. Kevin is characterized as uneducated and working class, with much emphasis being placed on his work as a laborer on building sites. This furthers the author's decision to depict the most devoutly religious characters in the novel as being less educated than the less religious and atheist characters. This can also be seen in the Jewish couple, the Bernsteins.

## Marina Greene

Marina Green is the social worker assigned to Adam Henry's case. She witnessed the first interaction between Fiona and Adam and her presence made Fiona nervous because she was worried that Marina might think that Fiona's behavior was unprofessional. This foreshadows Fiona's behavior later in the novel when she allowed her fear of professional failure prevent her from behaving kindly and supportively towards Adam. Marina is the character Fiona called when she first heard the news of Adam's death. In the background, Fiona could hear the sounds of Marina's family, once again reminding Fiona of her own lack of children.

## Mark Berner

Mark Berner is a barrister. He represented the hospital during Adam Henry's case and argued that Adam should be forced to have a blood transfusion against his wishes. Fiona and Mark perform together at the annual Christmas Concert at Gray's Inn where they both live. These concerts are the reason Fiona knew the music which she played with Adam when she visited him in hospital. Fiona's performances with Mark serve as a contrast to her playing with Adam. The performances with Mark are judged by her professional colleagues and both Fiona and Mark felt under pressure to perform to the highest possible standard. With Adam, Fiona was not worried about impressing anyone, she was simply playing for the joy of the music. This symbolizes the missing aspects of family, joy, and fun, in Fiona's life. Jack accused Fiona of losing her sense of fun and used this as justification for his affair, so when her sense of fun reappears in the hospital with Adam it is a sign that she is rediscovering lost elements of her personality.



## Mr. Justice Sherwood Runcie

Mr. Justice Sherwood Runcie is another high court judge and a colleague of Fiona's. His function in the novel is to spread gossip. This is an unusual decision by the author as stereotypically female characters are used to perform the function of the gossip more often than male characters. Runcie is introduced telling Fiona some information which sets him up as a source of gossip. Later, Fiona feared he would somehow find out about her kiss with Adam. It is Runcie who eventually informed Fiona of Adam's death although it is unclear how he could have come across this information before Fiona did.

## The Bernsteins

The Bernsteins are a Jewish couple who were part of the Chareidi community of Orthodox Jews living in north London. After they divorced, they disagreed about how best to raise their two daughters. Similarly to Kevin Henry, Mr. Bernstein's devoutly religious attitude is linked to his lack of education. Mrs. Bernstein had a university degree and wished for her children to be raised in a less devout environment whereas the Mr. Bernstein had very little education and wished to prevent his daughters from going to university.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Blood Transfusion

The blood transfusion given to Adam against his will in order to treat his leukemia is a symbol of his transition from devoutly religious to atheist. Adam was opposed to the transfusion because he believed that allowing the blood of another living being into his own body was against the wishes of God. But when he received the blood transfusion it changed his life by making him question his faith. Just as Adam was literally transfused with new blood, he was symbolically transfused with new ideas when Fiona ruled that he must undergo the treatment. When Fiona failed to provide Adam with a new set of ideas to replace his lost religion, Adam had no option but to return to his parents. When his leukemia returned, Adam refused another blood transfusion which also symbolically meant refusing a transfusion of new ideas and a new way of life to replace his old religious existence. As a result of refusing the treatment, and refusing the new ideas, Adam died.

## Blue Envelopes

The blue envelopes symbolize Adam's cries for help. Whenever Adam wrote to Fiona he sent his letters in a blue envelope so that whenever Fiona saw a blue envelope in her pile of mail, she knew that he had contacted her again. The blue envelopes became something that Fiona feared and dreaded because she did not want to engage with the responsibility of helping Adam or responding to his correspondence, largely because she feared it would affect her professional standing. The blue envelopes appear twice at Fiona's place of work and once at home. In the first incidence Fiona reacted as if she expected something abusive or suspicious and considered asking Nigel Pauling to open it for her instead. The second instance was also greeted with fear as the envelope arrived at Fiona's home which was evidence that Adam had been following her. The third letter was once again delivered to Fiona's place of work which symbolized her fear that Adam's behavior would compromise her professional standing.

## Violin

Adam's violin is a symbol of the joy and meaning of life. Although when Adam first started to learn to play the violin he was refusing the blood transfusion and claimed he was prepared to die for his beliefs, his decision to start learning the violin when he was so close to death was symbolic of his desire to live. Art for art's sake and the pleasure that humans can take in things like music symbolize the value and meaning of life for people who do not believe in a higher power or a higher purpose to human existence. When Adam began to learn the violin it symbolized his willingness to find value in life beyond his religious beliefs. This symbolism is solidified when Fiona – the person who will destroy Adam's religious faith – joins Adam when he plays his violin. The two of



them making music together offers a different possible future for Adam in which he does not need to use his religion as a crutch and in which he can find meaning and value in different aspects of life, such as art and music.

## Piano

The piano symbolizes Fiona's rigidity and coldness. Jack tried to get Fiona to learn how to play jazz on the piano but she was unable to do it, instead only being able to play classical music which symbolized the lack of spontaneity and fun which Jack had accused her of. Jazz is also associated with sexual freedom and promiscuity and Fiona's inability to embrace this kind of music when she played the piano was symbolic of her sexual withdrawal from Jack and her refusal to allow him to experiment with an open marriage and an extra-marital affair with Melanie the statistician. When Fiona first heard about Adam's death, the piano was a symbol of her emotional detachment. Instead of breaking down upon hearing the news, Fiona went through with a piano recital with Mark Berner. It was only after she had fulfilled her obligations on the piano that she allowed her emotional response to Adam's death to surface.

## Suitcase

Jack's suitcase symbolizes the state of Jack and Fiona's marriage. In the opening chapter, when Fiona noticed Jack wheeling his suitcase down the street outside of their apartment, it was the first sign to Fiona that Jack was being truly serious about his proposal involving Melanie. When Jack returned to their shared home the fact that he has brought his suitcase with him was evidence that he intended to reconcile with Fiona, rather than just coming home in order to pick up more of his things before he returned to Melanie. When Jack came into the apartment he put his suitcase in their bedroom. When Fiona indicated that she was still angry with him, he responded by saying he would move the suitcase. Later, after they had discussed the situation further, Fiona ended the conversation by telling Jack that she would be taking his suitcase out of the bedroom and putting it into the hallway.

## Newcastle

Newcastle is a symbol of the lost freedom and fun of Fiona's youth. When Fiona was a teenager she used to visit her cousins who lived in Newcastle. Fiona would drink alcohol and hang out with musicians, two things which she would never have been allowed to do at home. Fiona looked back on that time with fondness and her time there is symbolic of the fun side of her personality which she has repressed in the name of professional success. It is her repression of these aspects of her character which led to Jack becoming dissatisfied with their marriage. Newcastle is also the location of Fiona's kiss with Adam, symbolizing the illicit and romantic parts of Fiona's personality, just as it did when Fiona was a teenager. A return to London for Fiona is a return to respectability and professionalism.



## Stiletto

Fiona recalls an occasion when she met Melanie. The younger woman is described in the narration as “a silent young woman with heavy amber beads and a taste for the kind of stilettos that could wreck an old oak floor”. Describing Melanie as silent is a reference to her character's silent function in the novel. The stilettos are a symbol of her sex appeal and the potential damage her sex appeal will do to the “old oak floor” of Jack and Fiona's marriage.

## Taxi

The taxi which took Adam away from Leadman hall is symbolic of Fiona's refusal to accept responsibility for Adam or to allow him to become a part of her life. When Fiona told Adam that he had to leave Newcastle and that she would not let him come to live with her and Jack as a lodger, she asked Nigel Pauling to call for a taxi to take Adam away from Leadman Hall. Getting her clerk to call the taxi, rather than arranging transport and accommodation for Adam herself, symbolized Fiona's desire to keep a professional distance rather than engage with Adam on an emotional level or as a surrogate mother.

## Coffee

Coffee is used as a symbol of the gradual mending of Jack and Fiona's marriage. When Jack first moved back in, their relationship was extremely tense. Fiona noticed a change occur when one morning Jack made her a cup of coffee exactly the way she liked it and handed it to her when she came into the kitchen. This small gesture, without any words, was symbolic of Jack's desire to heal their broken marriage and to get back to a place in their relationship where they would make small gestures of kindness to each other as a matter of course.

## Champagne

Champagne is a step up from coffee as a symbol of Jack's attempts to demonstrate to Fiona that he is committed to repairing their marriage. Jack buys champagne to share with Fiona on the night of her performance at Gray's Inn as a way of rekindling their romance and (Jack hopes) their sexual relationship. Later in the chapter the champagne symbolizes the fact that a void still exists between Jack and Fiona: Jack tried to return to drinking the champagne when they came back from the concert, but Fiona was no longer interested in a romantic evening because she was too shocked by the news of Adam's death.

# Settings

## Gray's Inn Square

Gray's Inn Square is where Fiona lives with Jack. Gray's Inn Square is the only location in the novel where Fiona interacts with Jack and their flat is the symbol of their marriage. The way Jack and Fiona interact with their surroundings when at home reflects the state of their emotional connection. When they are estranged, the couple avoids each other by spending their time in separate rooms. Jack slept in the spare bedroom for most of the novel so when he returns to their shared bedroom in the final chapter it shows that their marriage has been saved.

## Royal Courts of Justice

The Royal Courts of Justice is where Fiona works. Fiona is most comfortable in this location because she is in control and is protected from having to respond to situations in an emotional way. At this location, Fiona's judgement and perspective is carried out with the full force of the law, in contrast to her home life with Jack, where her feelings and views are ignored or disputed.

## Newcastle

Newcastle is a city in the North East of England where Fiona used to visit her cousins when she was a teenager. The city is associated with a carefree and fun side of Fiona's personality which Jack accused her of losing touch with. When Fiona visited Newcastle again as an adult, it was the scene of her kiss with Adam, once again representing a less controlled, more emotional and irrational side of Fiona's character.

## Leadman Hall

Leadman Hall is a manor house in Newcastle where Fiona and other judges stay when visiting the city on legal business. It is a symbol of class privilege and inequality. At a time when many ordinary British people are unable to afford the fees needed to gain quality legal counsel, judges like Fiona stay in lavish surroundings and are served by a butler, all at the expense of British taxpayers.

## Hospital

The hospital is the location where Fiona and Adam first meet. Hospitals are places that have happy memories for Fiona because she enjoyed her time being an in-patient in a hospital after a bike accident when she was a child. The hospital is symbolic of the



secular/scientific/rational world which seeks to save Adam's life in opposition to the religious world which believes he should refuse the necessary medical treatment.



# Themes and Motifs

## Religion

The central theme of the novel is Religion. The novel explores whether religion's influence on society and on specific individuals is positive and negative and whether religion is a useful place for people to search for the meaning of life. The author goes to great lengths to articulate the arguments of the religious characters – most notably the arguments put forward by the Henry family about their opposition to blood transfusion – but ultimately the novel takes a firm anti-religious stance.

The religious characters in the novel are consistently portrayed as being less educated than the non-religious characters, implying that the devout practice of religion occurs only amongst people who lack the knowledge and experience to view the world in a different more open-minded way. In the first religious case which Fiona casts judgement on – the case of the orthodox Jews the Bernsteins – the case is presented as an argument in favor or against education for women. Mrs. Bernstein, who went to university, is the less religious of the two and Mr. Bernstein, who has had very little education and opposes a university education for his daughters, is depicted as the more devoutly religious of the two. Kevin Henry, in particular, is characterized as a working class laborer in contrast to the upper middle class professionals with whom Fiona associates in her private life: once again the less educated of the characters is associated with devout religious belief. Fiona considers Adam's religious belief to be something he will outgrow once he has the opportunity to gain more education: one of her arguments for not replying to his letters is that he will soon go to university, which she believes will lessen the intense feelings he has surrounding his blood transfusion and everyone who was involved in the court case.

After Adam's death, Fiona realized that Adam had been searching for a new form of meaning to replace the meaning he lost when he lost his religious faith. This is the moment where the author reveals his stance on the topic of religion when he writes that Adam "came to find her [Fiona], wanting what everyone wanted, and what only free-thinking people, not the supernatural, could give. Meaning." The author makes the argument that devoutly religious people are not "free-thinking people" and that trying to find the meaning of life through the "supernatural" is impossible. The implication of this passage, and the novel as a whole, is that meaning cannot be found until people have broken free from the religious messages with which they have been brought up. The substitute for religious meaning which is used throughout the novel is artistic meaning: both Adam and Fiona come to understand both themselves and each other more deeply through their engagement with music and poetry.



## Law

Law is an important theme in the novel which is closely intertwined with the novel's main theme of Religion. Fiona's judgements passed down by law represent a secular alternative to the judgements of God by which Adam Henry and his family rule their lives and make their decisions. Whereas God's judgement, as understood by the Henry family, will be passed on judgement day or when their lives come to an end, Fiona's judgements affect the here and now and will have real-world immediate consequences for the people she is in charge of judging. Fiona works as a high court judge and her entire adult life has been devoted to the law, at the expense of creating her own family by having children. In this way, Fiona has sacrificed her own personal happiness and fulfillment in service to the law, just as Adam has sacrificed his own physical wellbeing (and eventually his life) in service of the Lord.

On the surface, the language of the law sounds objective and rational but the novel goes to great lengths to present the law as a subjective matter, the outcome of which can be determined by the particular personalities and prejudices involved. Fiona's dislike of Mr. Justice Sherwood Runcie stems from the time he found an innocent woman guilty of murdering her children, by believing evidence presented in court which turned out to have no basis in scientific fact.

Also depicted is the number of different perspectives and prior judgements which have to be taken into account during a court case and which judges like Fiona must reach a subjective conclusion about in order to make their judgements. Adam Henry's case is the central example of this. Two opposing, but equally legal, perspectives on Adam's case exist: whether or not Adam can be considered to be "Gillick competent" (meaning a child under the age of 16 is permitted to make their own medical decisions if it can be established that they are sufficiently intelligent to understand what is being proposed), or whether Adam's wellbeing should be the primary focus, as demanded in Children Act of 1989 which states that "When a court determines any question with respect to... the upbringing of a child... the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration." This statement from the Children Act wins over Fiona in her judgement on Adam's case and is also used as the novel's epigraph.

Fiona's position as a judge, and her suitability for the role, are frequently called into question in the novel through passages which question her ability to empathize with people from different backgrounds and with different experiences to her own. Fiona has led a very privileged upper middle class life which has protected her from facing the kind of difficulties which many of the people brought before her in court have had to face. This is demonstrated during her taxi ride through South London in which she expressed disdain for the people making their lives in the less wealthy parts of the capital, her inappropriate feelings of pleasure and anticipation when visiting a hospital, and her teenage visits to the predominantly working class city of Newcastle which were nevertheless spent with her very wealthy relatives.



## Childlessness

Childlessness is the theme which most haunts Fiona's emotional life. Although the troubles in her marriage with Jack are initially introduced as stemming from Jack's sexual dissatisfaction, as the novel progresses, it becomes more and more clear that Fiona's unexpressed grief over her Childlessness is an equally destructive force in the marriage which will prevent Jack and Fiona from reconciling if it is not aired in the open.

When Adam and Fiona kiss it initially appears to the reader that the nature of the blossoming connection between the two of them might be romantic or sexual in nature, echoing the romantic/sexual nature of the relationship between Jack and the much younger Melanie. However, when Fiona broke down in the final chapter in response to hearing the news of Adam's death she responded in a maternal fashion, describing Adam as "a lovely boy," rather than like a woman who has lost a potential lover. Adam appeared in Fiona's life as a potential surrogate son at the very moment her struggles in her marriage with Jack were forcing her to confront how much she regretted not having children. However Fiona continued to put her career and her professional standing ahead of her role as a surrogate mother and once again pushed away her opportunity to create a family of her own in favor of hiding behind her work.

The theme of childless older professional women who regret that their career has stopped them from having children is a frequent trope in contemporary fiction and this novel does little to extend or question the basic assumptions of the stereotype of the childless professional woman. The implication is that if Fiona had been less committed to her career in the law she would have had a more fulfilling life because she would have had the experience of being a mother. No equal argument is made to suggest that Jack's life is somehow unfulfilled because he never became a father: indeed Jack's dissatisfaction with his life is described and discussed in purely sexual rather than parental terms. Although Fiona is saddened during the visit of their nieces by the reminder that Jack is very good with children, this is depicted as a further regret of Fiona's (that she will never see Jack father their own children) rather than a regret of Jack's.

In a novel which goes to great lengths to discuss the two sides of each story when it comes to cases presented in the court of law it is disappointing that a different interpretation on Fiona's childlessness – one which focusses on the joy she takes in her work, rather than how harrowing and traumatic it is – was not put forward. Although Mr. Bernstein is criticized in the novel for his attitude towards his daughters' education and his opposition to women working outside of the home, the focus on Fiona's childlessness seems to have a similar message for young female readers: that a professional career and a happy family life are mutually exclusive and that women who choose to pursue a career will be consumed by grief over their choice not to have a family, an old-fashioned and outdated attitude for a 21st century novel.



## Marriage

The theme of Marriage is explored in the novel through the relationship of Fiona and Jack, but also through the many divorce cases and custody disputes which are brought before Fiona as part of her work as a high court judge.

Throughout the novel marriage is discussed as if it is a matter of the law rather than a matter of the heart, a technique best represented by Jack's way of speaking with Fiona when he first proposed the idea of Fiona agreeing to Jack having an extra-marital affair with his colleague Melanie. Jack presented his evidence as if he was presenting a case in court, stating: "I need it. I'm fifty-nine. This is my last shot. I've yet to hear evidence of the afterlife." He then continued the discussion by cross-examining Fiona when she attempted to present the case for the opposition by interrupting her complaints with a question: "Fiona, when did we last make love?" Fiona's own thoughts on the proposed affair focused on their marriage as a pre-existing agreement: she reflects that the correct time to suggest an open-marriage is when the couple first got married, not decades after the initial agreement is reached.

Although Fiona and Jack's marriage is pushed to the breaking point by Fiona's emotional withdrawal and Jack's thwarted attempt at an affair with Melanie, their marriage is depicted throughout the novel as something that is worth saving. The moments when Jack made sincere attempts to mend their relationship (when he made Fiona a coffee and bought her some champagne before her concert) are touching and poignant, in marked contrasts to their arguments in which Jack attempted to justify his dalliance with Melanie by placing the blame for his behavior on Fiona. That Fiona and Jack's marriage is depicted as something worth fighting to save, contrasts with the depiction of marriage in the divorce and custody hearings brought before Fiona as part of her work as a high court judge in the area of family law. Fiona's distress in her own marriage was reflected back at her through her work life during the summer of 2012 when Jack had moved back into the apartment but they had yet to fully reconcile or resume sharing the same bedroom. Once again, during the divorce and custody hearings Fiona presided over that summer, marriage is discussed in legal terms as something to be defined and argued over: "In the minds of the principals, the history of the marriage was redrafted to have been always doomed, love was recast as delusion."

The breakdown of Fiona's marriage brings about the gradual breakdown of the detached and professional demeanor which she employed at work. As her marriage fails, her ability to avoid acting emotionally decreases leading to spontaneous and irrational actions such as her insistence on visiting Adam in hospital, despite such behavior from a high court judge being highly out of the ordinary.

## The British Class System

The British Class System is explored in the novel through Fiona's work as a high court judge and through the experiences of some of her legal colleagues. This theme is explored most thoroughly through the character of Mark Berner, a barrister who



represented a working class client whose friends and family clubbed together in order to raise enough money to pay for Mark's legal fees. This reflects growing concerns in the United Kingdom about cuts to the funding for Legal Aid, which is supposed to ensure that anyone – regardless of their economic background – has access to quality legal representation when taken to court.

Mark compared the behavior of his client to the behavior of wealthy upper class men who attended Oxford University and were members of the infamous Bullingdon Club. Mark argued that if his client, and the other men involved in the pub brawl which led to their arrests, had been members of a society such as the Bullingdon Club then they would not have been arrested. Instead, because the men involved in this case were working class, they were not only arrested but were charged with the serious offense of Grievous Bodily Harm (often shortened to GBH) and Mark's client faced 5 years of prison time as a result. Mark believed the incident to be a very minor altercation in which no one was seriously harmed and even the victim didn't think the attackers should be given prison time.

Another perspective on class is given through Fiona's relationship with the city of Newcastle, a predominantly working class region of England. Despite the relative lack of wealth in the city, Fiona's relatives in Newcastle are described as being the wealthiest people Fiona had ever known. This underscores how far-removed Fiona is from the average experience of citizens of the United Kingdom. Even when Fiona does visit working class regions she remains coddled and sheltered by her privilege. This is the case during her teenage visits to her wealthy cousins and during her professional visit during the course of the novel. In the latter instance Fiona is secluded in Leadman Hall, an old manor house with outdated upper-class services such as a butler. At a time when Mark Berner's clients can't afford to hire quality legal representation, legal professionals such as Fiona are being fed and housed in luxurious surroundings at the expense of taxpayers.

The theme of Class also relates to the theme of Religion. Throughout the novel less educated working class characters are depicted as more religious than middle class and well educated characters. This is the case with the Bernsteins: the father is uneducated and wished his daughters to be raised in a strict religious environment, whereas the mother was a professional woman with a university degree who wanted their upbringing to be less strict. Adam's father Kevin Henry is depicted as a working class laborer and the novel implies that Kevin's lack of education and economic security made him vulnerable to the overtures of the Jehovah's Witnesses who visited the Henrys at their home and convinced them to convert to their religion.

# Styles

## Point of View

The novel is told in the third person in the past tense, with an omniscient narrator. Despite being written in the third person, the novel is nevertheless presented entirely from the perspective of Fiona Maye. No events occur in the novel without Fiona being there to witness them and the perspectives of all the other characters are filtered through Fiona's own perspective and her interpretation of their actions and words. This use of Point of View reflects Fiona's occupation as a high court judge. When Fiona is at work different people present different, and often diametrically opposed, arguments to her but it is ultimately Fiona's own interpretation of what everyone else says and does which constitutes the final say in the matter from a legal perspective.

The use of Point of View narrows the focus of the novel to Fiona's interior concerns and creates a claustrophobic tone as a result. It also serves to make the relationship between Fiona and Adam feel more intense, because it is one of only two relationships explored in depth in the novel (the other being Fiona's marriage with Jack). Fiona interacts with very few people in the novel and even fewer on a personal or emotional level: of all the characters in the novel Fiona only ever expresses her emotions to Jack. Fiona had the opportunity to express her emotional side with Adam when he followed her to Newcastle, but she made the decision to maintain her cold professional disposition instead.

The narration makes reference to three close friends who Fiona could have called upon for support dealing with Jack's proposed affair with Melanie but none of these friends ever make an appearance in the narrative, nor does the reader ever discover their names. Fiona choosing not to contact anyone to assist her in coping with Jack's behavior is symbolic of how closed off she has become to her emotions and how much she has allowed her career to define everything about her life.

## Language and Meaning

The author uses language which reflects the style and terminology of the law throughout the novel, not just in the parts concerning legal cases. For example, in Chapter 1, when Fiona and Jack have their initial argument about the proposed affair with Melanie, both characters approached the topic as if it was a legal case. Jack presented his reasons for wanting the affair in a straightforward, unemotional style and used legal terminology when he told Fiona he wanted to make the most of his life in the here and now because "I've yet to hear evidence for an afterlife." When Fiona reflects on Jack's proposal, the author uses language which shows that Fiona was thinking of their marriage as a legal agreement between herself and Jack: "The moment to propose an open marriage was before the wedding, not thirty-five years later." This use of language reflects the core issue at the center of the trouble in Jack and Fiona's marriage: Fiona's dedication to her



job and her subsequent emotional detachment from Jack. Jack and Fiona talk to each other with language taken from the world of Fiona's work, rather than emotional language more associated with family and romantic concerns.

The author also uses poetry as a way of giving further insight into the character of Adam Henry. Adam's poetry reveals his fragile emotional state of mind and should have served to Fiona as a warning that his wellbeing was in danger. By the time Fiona looked more deeply into the significance of the lines in Adam's final poem ("May he who drowns my cross by his own hand be slain") it was too late.

Language is also used to distinguish between social classes, for example one of the nurses at the hospital where Adam was treated speaks in a more colloquial and less grammatical way than the people Fiona usually associates with: "You got to admire him. Living for his principles, is it."

## Structure

The novel is structured into 5 chapters, each of which contains one significant life-changing event for Fiona. In Chapter 1, Jack told Fiona that he wanted to have an affair with Melanie. In Chapter 2, Fiona heard the arguments in the case of Adam Henry. In Chapter 3, Fiona visited the hospital and met Adam in person. In Chapter 4, Adam followed Fiona to Newcastle and they kissed. In Chapter 5, Fiona was informed that Adam had died. These events are told in chronological order. The rest of the narrative consists of reminiscences and interludes which do not contribute to the forward motion of the plot, instead serving to add background detail about Fiona's life and about the state of the legal profession in contemporary Britain as well as legal cases from further in the past.

Examples of interludes which give further information about Fiona's past include Fiona's extended reminiscences about her childhood injury and subsequent stay in hospital, her teenage visits to Newcastle, and the early years of her relationship with Jack before her career took over her life. Extended extracts revealing the state of the legal profession in contemporary Britain include Fiona's recollection of the case involving the conjoined twins, Mark Berner's extensive discussion of the case of one of his clients who was serving jail time as a result of a fight outside of a pub, and the gossip from colleagues that Fiona heard at the Gray's Inn Christmas Concert prior to her performance with Mark. Reflections on legal cases of the past included Sherwood Runcie's past and the unreliable evidence which was used to convict an innocent woman for the murder of her children.

The extracts involving reflections on Fiona's past and the extensive discussion of legal cases don't have any impact on the events of the novel. Although they add to the depth and authenticity of the portrayal of the protagonist and the world she lives in, because these extracts considerably outnumber the portions of the novel dedicated to the story of Fiona's relationship with Adam, they serve to make the pace of the narrative somewhat slow and long-winded.





## Quotes

You idiot! You fucking idiot!' She had not sworn out loud since her carefree teenage visits to Newcastle

-- Fiona/Narration (chapter 1 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Fiona's initial response to Jack's proposed affair is to swear at him. The reflection that she had not sworn such she was a teenager is symbolic of how uptight and detached from her emotions Fiona has become in her adult life.

I need it. I'm fifty-nine. This is my last shot. I've yet to hear any evidence for an afterlife.

-- Jack (chapter 1 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Jack used these words to justify his desire for an affair to Fiona. He presented his case as if Fiona was denying him an opportunity, rather than suggesting that he was doing something which could damage their marriage. Jack's mention of the afterlife, and his lack of belief, foreshadows the religious theme of the novel which will emerge in the Adam Henry case.

Your problem," he said from the far end of the room, "is that you never think you have to explain yourself. You've gone from me. It must have occurred to you that I've noticed and that I mind.

-- Jack (chapter 1 paragraph Section 3, paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Jack used these words to explain to Fiona how her own actions and behavior have contributed to the problems in their marriage. At work, Fiona is a judge who has the final say in matters and who must write lengthy justifications for her decisions, but at home she has failed to explain her feelings and behavior to Jack. This is symbolic of Fiona's decision to make work more of a priority than her personal life.

Yes, her childlessness was a fugue in itself, a flight – this was a habitual theme she was trying now to resist – a flight from her proper destiny. Her failure to become a woman, as her mother understood the term.

-- Narration (chapter 2 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Fiona reflected on her lack of children the day after Jack left her to be with Melanie. Although Jack's desertion has prompted these thoughts this time, this quotations reveals that her childlessness is something that perpetually upsets Fiona. Although she has become successful professionally, she fears that she has not lived up to her mother's or society's standards for what a woman should be.

His views are those of his parents. They're not his own. His objection to being transfused is based on the doctrines of a religious cult for which he may well become a pointless martyr.

-- Consultant Hematologist (chapter 2 paragraph Section 2, paragraph 47)



**Importance:** The consultant hematologist representing the hospital in Adam Henry's case makes this argument whilst being questioned in court. These words are also, in many ways, the heart of the novel's message. The novel argues that, although it is important to respect others' beliefs and feelings about medical treatment, in the case of children brought up in a strict religion they are too young to know whether or not their views are sincerely held or whether they are merely going along with the teachings of the adults around them.

She had a north Londoner's ignorance of and disdain for the boundless shabby tangle of London south of the river... Why make a life here?

-- Narration (chapter 3 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Fiona makes this reflection on her way to visit Adam in the hospital. It reflects Fiona's personal snobbery as well as a wider problem in the British legal system of the people in positions of power having no knowledge, sympathy, or understanding of the nation's poor and the realities of their lives.

In short, I find that A, his parents and the elders of the church have made a decision which is hostile to A's welfare, which is this court's paramount consideration. He must be protected from such a decision. He must be protected from his religion and from himself.

-- Fiona (chapter 3 paragraph Section 2, paragraph 15)

**Importance:** Fiona's verdict in Adam Henry's case is a major turning point in the novel which will change the course of Adam's life. Because of Fiona's verdict, Adam will lose his faith in his religion but will find no other alternative worldview to help him survive into adulthood. Overall, the novel takes the view that strict religious ideas are bad for the wellbeing of children.

When one of his nieces dropped off her children for the weekend, identical twin girls aged eight, matters became easier, the apartment grew larger as attention grew outwards.

-- Narration (chapter 4 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** The tension between Fiona and Jack eases when they have children staying with them at their home. This is symbolic of the difficulties that have been caused in their marriage by Fiona's decision not to have children: this extract suggests that both Jack and Fiona would have been less concerned with their own selfish interests (sex for Jack, work for Fiona) if they had a family to divert and expand their attention.

When I saw my parents crying like that, really crying, crying and sort of hooting for joy, everything collapsed. But this is the point. It collapsed into the truth. Of course they didn't want me to die! They love me. Why didn't they say that, instead of going on about the joys of heaven? That's when I saw it was an ordinary human thing. Ordinary and good. It wasn't about God at all. That was just silly.

-- Adam (chapter 4 paragraph Section 3, paragraph 85)



**Importance:** Adam used these words to explain to Fiona why he had lost his religious faith after Fiona forced him to undergo a blood transfusion against his will. He looked back on his religion as a delusion from which he was now free and which he can now see was foolish and unnecessary. Adam thinks of his own parents as hypocrites for preaching their religion when they were really hoping that Adam would survive.

She was not prone to wild impulses and she didn't understand her own behavior. She realized there was much more to confront in her confused mix of feelings, but for now it was the horror of what might have come about, the ludicrous and shameful transgression of professional ethics, that occupied her.

-- Fiona (chapter 5 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Fiona's kiss with Adam is one of the rare instances in the novel when Fiona does something irrational, foolhardy, or emotional. While trying to process her emotions about her rash behavior, Fiona immediately turned to obsessing over its potential to damage her career, demonstrating that she continued to value her job more highly than her relationships and emotional connections.

If these four gentlemen had been members at the Bullingdon Club at Oxford they wouldn't be before you now, Your Honour.

-- Mark Berner (chapter 5 paragraph Section 2, paragraph 29)

**Importance:** Mark Berner repeated these arguments that he'd made in court to Fiona when they were practicing for the Christmas concert. Mark argued that working class people in Britain were treated differently to the wealthy upper classes in the eyes of the law. This argument didn't have the intended effect as Mark later discovered that the judge he was arguing his case before used to be a member of the Bullingdon Club.

Welfare, well-being, was social. No child is an island. She thought her responsibilities ended at the courtroom walls. But how could they? He came to find her, wanting what everyone wanted, what only free-thinking people, not the supernatural, could give. Meaning.

-- Narration (chapter 5 paragraph Section 5, paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Fiona's reflection on her failure to provide Adam with what he wanted from her when he sought her out after his court case also serves as the moral message of the novel as a whole. It is not enough to simply challenge religious doctrine or to rescue individual children from the harm being caused by their religious upbringing. Those opposed to religion must also offer people from this kind of background a new way of looking at the world through which they can find meaning.