



## Ethical Dilemma and Ethical Epiphany in McEwan's *The Children Act*

Biwu Shang

*Shanghai Jiao Tong University*

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**Biwu Shang,**  
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**Abstract:** In his article "Ethical Dilemma and Ethical Epiphany in McEwan's *The Children Act*" Biwu Shang attempts to explore the ethical nature of the child's welfare in Ian McEwan's novel. Shang examines the various legal cases processed by the British High Court judge Fiona Maye and the blood transfusion case of Adam Henry in particular. Shang argues that Maye adopts ethical criteria throughout the cases she deals with. More significantly, Adam's blood transfusion case and his consequential death lead Maye to her ethical epiphany related to the child's welfare: life is the fundamental welfare of the child and to protect the child's welfare is, first and foremost, to protect and sustain his life and a judge's duty should not end in the courtroom walls, but be extended to the entire society.

**Biwu SHANG**

### **Ethical Dilemma and Ethical Epiphany in McEwan's *The Children Act***

As "a major voice in contemporary British Fiction" (Quigley 436) and "the best British writer of his generation" (Quigley 436), Ian McEwan has been widely known by the diversity of his subject matter "as varied as his choice of genre, alternating between sadomasochism (which earned him early in his career the title Ian MacAbre) and feminism, between historical fiction and contemporary psychological intrigue" (Quigley 436). About the thematic concerns of McEwan's novels, Peter Childs points out that "throughout his fiction, McEwan has dissected relationships between children and adults, particularly the ideas and fears that the young have about 'being grown up'" (174). McEwan has explored the issue of "growing up" of children in his most of works, which are aptly illustrated in his *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), *Between the Sheets* (1978), *The Cement Garden* (1978), *The Child in Time* (1987), *Atonement* (2001), and *The Children Act* (2014). In an interview, McEwan claims that "As children come more into your life the possibility of their death is not something you can play with lightly." (Roberts 30). Further, McEwan seems to have developed a profound interest in writing about professionals. For instance, in *Saturday* (2005) he writes about physicians, in *Solar* (2010) he turns to scientists, and in *Sweet Tooth* (2012) he depicts spies. McEwan's 2014 novel *The Children Act* has a protagonist named Fiona Maye who is a High Court judge. Interestingly, almost all cases she deals with are involved with the conflicts between religion and law and her court decisions go against the will of the people at the churches. *The Children Act* has been generally treated as a work about the conflicts between religion and the law. For instance, Paul Magrath argues that the novel reveals McEwan's particular interest in "cases involving conflicts between legal rights and religious obligations" (<<http://www.iclr.co.uk/children-act-ian-mcewan>>). Similarly, Sarah E. Green sees the novel as portraying "the interplay between the secular and the religious in the most crucial, life-changing of issues and how (in our jurisdiction at least), the law should, and will, ultimately prevail" (<<http://www.familylawweek.co.uk/site.aspx?i=ed132954>>). And Leo Robson points out that the novel "presents a scenario in which the virtues of the secular life, poetry included, fight against the consolations of religious belief and no winner is declared" (37). Although I am sympathetic with the above interpretations, I think these elements are at most a disguise in the novel. If viewed from the perspective of ethical literary criticism (see Nie; see also Shang <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2372>>), the central issue of the novel lies in Fiona's ethical dilemma and ethical epiphany of the child's welfare.

I agree with Brad Hooper, who argues that "With his trademark style, which is a tranquil mix of exacting word choice and easily flowing sentences, McEwan once again observes with depth and wisdom the universal truth in the uncommon situation." (31) Regrettably, Hooper does not specify what he means by "the universal truth in the uncommon situation." In my opinion it designates the difficulty of ethical choice a person is about to make when he/she encounters an ethical dilemma. From the perspective of ethical literary criticism, the decision of making an ethical choice is closely related to the protagonists' ethical identities. In the article at hand I examine the legal cases processed by Maye and her interpretation and judgment of the child's welfare. Further, I attempt to reveal her ultimate ethical epiphany: life is the fundamental welfare of the child and to protect the child's welfare is, first and foremost, to protect and sustain his life, and a judge's duty should not end in the courtroom walls, but be extended to the entire society. It is true that at the beginning of the novel, Fiona's marriage encounters an unprecedented crisis: her husband Jack asks for her permission to have an affair with a twenty-eight-year old statistician named Melanie. Feelings betrayed, Fiona refuses his request and their relationship ends in separation. In my opinion the novel's core is not about the marriage, but whether Fiona as a High Court judge could still handle her court cases and maintain her legal reasoning with reference to Section 1 (A) in *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 consideration" (*The Children Act* iv). As a matter of fact, "welfare" is not only the keyword written in books of law, but also the sole criterion for Fiona to make her court decisions. What is the child's welfare? How to protect the child's welfare? These are the two crucial questions for Fiona to answer when making her decisions. Fiona usually follows Lord Hailsham's precedent "in allowing the term to be inseparable from well-being and to include all that was relevant to a child's development as a person" (16). In other words, Fiona seems to interpret the child's welfare in a broad sense. Ironically, Fiona has a "satisfying work through engagement with demanding tasks" (17) and wins the esteem and admiration from her colleagues; while as a wife, she lacks a significant relation defined by love, which is due to the fact that her husband declares to have an affair with someone else. To Fiona, it is an unbearable and humiliating insult.

However, as argue above, in *The Children Act* McEwan's major concern is not to depict the marriage crisis of a British High Court judge, but to project her meditation and recognition of the child's welfare so as to raise readers' awareness of the relevant issues concerning children. About McEwan's style and strategies, Lynn Wells suggests that McEwan is good at "adopting different styles and genres

to suit the ideas as situations he finds most urgently in need of expression", and has become "more openly sophisticated about the power of narrative to communicate, to reconcile and at times to deceive" 11). McEwan skillfully embeds his ethical views of the child's welfare into Fiona's marriage crisis and the cases involving the conflicts between religion and the law. It is in his depictions of these crisis and conflicts that characters' ethical identities and their ethical choices are foregrounded. Fiona has two urgent cases to deal with, both of which are interwoven with religion. The first case is about the schooling of two Jewish schoolgirls named Rachel and Nora. Both parties, the mother Judith Bernstein and the father Julian Bernstein are from the Haredi community in north London. According to Heradim traditions, in order to preserve their purity the Heradi girls are educated separately from boys and they are forbidden to wear fashionable clothes, to have access to television and the internet. When they grow up, the girls are supposed to stay at home and raise children, the more the better. Against her husband's objections, Judith, breaking with the community, has sent her two daughters to a coeducational Jewish secondary school where they are permitted to watch television, to listen to pop music, to wear fashionable clothes, and to mingle with non-Jewish children. It is Judith's hope that her daughters will not repeat her story and will go to college someday if they want. She wants them to know more about others' life, to be more socially tolerant, to have career opportunities, to be economically self-dependent, and to meet and marry "the sort of husband with professional skills who could help to support a family. Unlike her husband, who gave all his time to studying, and teaching the Torah eight hours a week without pay" (12). Julian thinks that his wife is a selfish woman who has not only broken their marriage oath, but also cut off the connections between their daughters and the community. On the surface, the case is about two girls' education, but the real dispute is, as the opposing banisters agree, "not merely a matter of education" (14), but "a fight for their souls" (11). Given that, what the court must choose is "on behalf the children, between total religion and something a little less. Between cultures, identities, states of mind, aspirations, sets of family relations, fundamental definitions, basic loyalties, unknowable futures" (14).

Despite the fact that Fiona is bothered by her husband's insistence on having an affair with another woman, she remains calm and maintains her reason when handling this difficult case. In order to make a justified sentence, Fiona takes into consideration four elements: facts, background, moral issues, and the court-appointed social worker's report. In terms of dealing with the case concerning the conflicts between religion and the law, Fiona has no particular examples to follow. How to intervene the conflicts and to make a justified sentence? The novel documents her struggle for maintaining the balance: "it was no business of the secular court to decide between religious beliefs or theological differences. All religions were deserving of respect provided they were, in Lord Justice Puchas's phrase, 'legally and socially acceptable' and not, in Lord Justice Scarman's darker formulation, 'immoral or socially obnoxious'" (18). When quoting from Purchas, Fiona adds Scarman's words so as to stress that the court could accept the existence of religion only when it is not "immoral or socially obnoxious." In other words, when faced with the dilemma between religion and the law, Fiona resorts to an ethical perspective. In fact, as early as when she is sorting out the case, the novel already implies the ethical criterion Fiona is going to adopt: "In such matters there lurked an innate predisposition in favor of the status quo, as long as it appeared benign" (14). Thus, we can perceive of Fiona's attitude towards this case and her manner of dealing with it. That is, she is determined to object what is "immoral" and to support what is "benign." Generally speaking, the court should "be slow to intervene in the interests of the child against the religious principles of the parents. Sometimes they must. But when?" (18). If we look at the context of the case, we can see that Fiona seems to have found an answer to the question of when to intervene in the interests of the child against his parents' religious principles. That is, those religious principles must not be immoral but benign. In such a way does the novel imply Fiona's ethical engagement with this case and makes the decision that the girls should stay with their mother till they turn eighteen.

Compared with case of Rachel's and Nora's education, the case of separation surgery for the twin brothers Matthew and Mark is more complicated not only involved with law and religion, but also with medicine and surgery:

All the horror and pity, and the dilemma itself, were in the photograph, shown to the judge and no one else. Infant sons of Jamaican and Scottish parents lay top-and-tailed amid a tangle of life-support systems on a pediatric intensive-care bed, joined at the pelvis and sharing a single torso, their splayed legs at right angles to their spines, in resemblance of a many-pointed starfish. A measure fixed along the side the incubator showed this helpless, all-too-human ensemble to be sixty centimeters in length. Their spinal cords and the base of their spines were fused, their eyes closed, four arms raised in surrender to the court's decision. Their apostolic names, Matthew and Mark, had not encouraged clear thinking in some quarters. Matthew's head was swollen, his ears mere indentations in roseate skin. Mark's head, beneath the neonatal woolen cap, was normal. They shared only one organ, their bladder, which was mostly in Mark's abdomen and which, a consultant noted, "emptied spontaneously and freely through two separate urethras." Matthew's heart was large but "it barely squeezed." Mark's aorta fed into Matthew's and it was Mark's heart that sustained them both. Matthew's brain was severely malformed and not compatible with normal development; his chest cavity lacked functional lung tissue. He had, one of the nursing staff said, "not the lungs to cry with." Mark was sucking normally, feeding and breathing for both, doing "all the work" and therefore abnormally thin. Matthew, with nothing to do, was gaining weight. Left alone, Mark's heart would sooner or later fail from the effort, and both must die. Matthew was unlikely to live more than six months. When he died, he would take his brother with him. (17-26)

The physicians of a London hospital ask for permission from the court to separate the twins so as to save Mark's life since he is likely to survive and grow as a normal child. The question is, if the physicians were permitted to separate the twins, they would have to "clamp, then sever the shared aorta" (27), which would end in killing Matthew. More seriously, the twins' parents are against the physicians' suggestion owing to the fact that they are devout Catholics, insisting that "God gave life and only God could take it away" (27). Although the ultimate aim of the law is to pursue justice no matter what kind of judgment, it is doomed in this case. Specifically, if Fiona grants permission to conduct surgery to save Mark, it would equal making a death sentence for Matthew, which is unfair to him and if she rejects surgery to separate the twins, it would equal making a death sentence for Mark, which is unfair to him either. The root of the problem is that the twins' lives flow in two opposite directions as far as the surgery is concerned. Fiona feels torn apart by two opposing forces, both of which are going to affect her decision: "there could be no presumption that one life was worth more than another. Separating the twins would be to kill Matthew. Not separating them would, by omission, kill both" (28). There seems to be no space for Fiona to choose between medical science and religion, between religion and law, or between life and death. In Fiona's opinion, since "the legal and moral space was tight ... the matter had to be set as a choice of the lesser evil" (28). It is true that the court needs to consider both the boys' and their parents' interests. However, in Matthew's case if the court tries to maintain his best interest, the court should not choose the death sentence for him and the court needs to respect the fact he "had a rudimentary brain, no lungs, a useless heart, was probably in pain and condemned to die, and soon" (28). Regarding this, Fiona draws a conclusion that Matthew has no interest for the court to maintain and this is accepted by the Court of Appeal.

Following principles of her ethics, the way Fiona processed the case of Rachel's and Nora's education, she also attempts to process the case of Matthew and Mark's surgery. Fiona seems to deny that she adheres to ethical criteria. At the beginning of the judgment, she says that "This court is a court of law, not of morals, and our task has been to find, and our duty is then to apply, the relevant principles of law to the situation before us—a situation which is unique" (28). However, we can still detect the ethical principles Fiona applied throughout this case, which is typical of McEwan's style: to embed the ethical elements in the some easily overlooked details. I agree with Jiande Lu, who argues that "literature is saliently marked by its concreteness and specifications, and the ethical scenarios and characterizations are usually completed by the details of text" (20). In terms of the details concerning Fiona's judgment, we can notice that she uses the word "evil" three times: it has been used twice for emphasis of doing "the lesser evil" and it is used the other time to stress upon preventing "a greater evil." The concept "evil" and its antonym "goodness" are two keywords in ethical literary criticism. In Zhenzhao Nie's opinion "evil and goodness formulate the basic human ethics" (Introduction 36; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). It is for the purpose of pursuing and enhancing "goodness" that Fiona emphasized doing "the lesser evil" to prevent "a greater evil." In other words, Fiona attempts to substantiate her judgments from an ethical perspective. She is aware of the potential inconsistencies between law and ethics in certain cases. However, she still chooses to make her decision from an ethical perspective and attempts to seek support from law. In terms of doing "the lesser evil," Fiona realizes that "if the lesser evil is preferable, it might still be unlawful" (29). At issue is how to deal with the conflicts between "doing lesser evil" and "being unlawful"? Fiona finds her answer in the "doctrine of necessity ... an idea established in common law that in certain limited circumstances, which no parliament would ever care define, it was permissible to break the criminal law to prevent a greater evil" (29). Therefore, she makes a following decision: "Regarding the all-important matter of intent, the purpose of the surgery was not to kill Matthew but to save Mark. Matthew, in all his helplessness, was killing Mark and the doctors must be allowed to come to Mark's defense to remove a threat of a fatal harm. Matthew would perish after the separation not because he was purposefully murdered, but because on his own he was incapable of flourishing" (29).

Given its wordings and content, the sentence above looks more like an ethical judgment rather than a legal judgment. If Matthew has no interests for the court to maintain, then Fiona needs to consider Mark's interests only. In matters of Mark's interests, Fiona makes a positive comment on the surgery. In her opinion, the purpose of the surgery is not to murder Matthew, but to save Mark's life and the physicians try to protect Mark's life. Viewed from an ethical perspective, the judgment is made on behalf of Matthew in order to do "the lesser evil" (that is, to harm his brother Mark) and to prevent "a greater evil" (that is, to murder his brother Mark). To put it another way, if Matthew has no chance to survive and is doomed to die soon, why should he not give Mark an opportunity to live? In her judgment, Fiona has taken good care of all parties' interests: saving Mark's life, helping Mathew to prevent an act of "greater evil," and giving the physicians a strong reason to perform the surgery.

Claudia Schemberg observes that since the late 1980s and early 1990s, McEwan has openly engaged "in complex ethical, social and historical issues" (28), getting rid of his nickname "Ian Macabre" and turning into "a social or moral prophet" (29). Schemberg is an astute commentator; however, to me the issue is what moral prophecy McEwan made in *The Children Act*? To answer this question, we need to look at Adam's blood transfusion case: a boy named Adam Henry is diagnosed with leukemia. According to physicians, he must receive treatment involving blood transfusion otherwise his life will

be endangered. However, both Adam and his parents are devout Jehovah's Witnesses, and their religion does not allow blood transfusion. To use Mr. Henry's words, "blood is the essence of what's human. It's the soul, it's life itself. And just as life is sacred, so is blood ... Blood stands for the gift of life that every living soul should be grateful for" (78). Fiona decides to go to the hospital to hear what Adam has to say. She says that "it's not his knowledge of scripture that interests me so much as his understanding of his situation, and of what he confronts should I rule against the hospital. Also, he should know that he is not in the hands of an impersonal bureaucracy. I shall explain to him that I am the one who will be making the decision in his best interest" (91). In other words, Fiona hopes to make it clear to Adam that she is not a person of impersonal bureaucracy, but a responsible judge who intends to maintain his best interests. When meeting Adam in person, Fiona finds him smart, clever, and innocent: "Adam's unworldliness made him endearing, but vulnerable" (112). Failing to communicate with Adam on a number of issues, Fiona draws Adam closer to her by talking about poetry for which Adam feels grateful and starts reading one of his original poems to her. In the poem, Adam makes it clear that he is determined to sacrifice himself for his religion. To Adam's excitement, Fiona seems to have understood his poem, which is incomprehensible to the nurses and physicians of the hospital. However, the poem testifies to Fiona's assumption that Adam's decision has been affected by someone from his Church. As is disclosed by Adam's father, one of the elders of the church, Mr. Crosby, goes to the hospital to visit Adam frequently, the purpose of which is, on the one hand to bring him spiritual relief, and on the other hand to make him insist on refusing blood transfusion. Adam confesses that "Mr. Crosby, told me that if the worst was to happen, it would have a fantastic effect on everyone" (113). The elders of the Church intend to sacrifice Adam and to make him a martyr so as to let other believers feel God's love, but what they project is about Adam's after-life not the happiness that Adam should deserve in this life.

When Fiona is just about to leave the hospital, Adam plays a piece of music for her by using his violin, which makes her have a deeper understanding of this boy: "the melancholy tune and the manner in which it was played, so hopeful, so raw expressed everything she was beginning to understand about the boy. She knew by heart the poet's words of regret. *But I, being young and foolish* ... Hearing Adam play stirred her, even as it baffled her. To make up the violin or any instrument was an act of hope, it implied a future" (119; italics in the original). Listening to Adam's play, Fiona not only reminds him of his C sharp, but also asks him to replay it. In his second play, Fiona sings along the poem "Down by the Salley Gardens" in which she invests much emotion. Before making a judgment, Fiona declares that she understands and respects each party's request: the physicians ask for permission to perform blood transfusion because they see that Adam's life is danger and Adam and his parents object to treatment because it is against their religion. To make a justified judgment, Fiona addresses three arguments of her objection. Her first argument is that Adam will turn to eighteen within three months, he knows the consequences of his decision, and thus his decision to reject blood transfusion should be respected. Fiona refutes by drawing people's attention to "a distinction between a competent child under sixteen consenting to treatment, possibly against the wishes of its parents and a child under eighteen refusing life-saving treatment" (124). Despite the fact Adam is intelligent, he seems to hold a romantic notion about what he is going to suffer. The second objection is that refusing medical treatment is a fundamental human right and the court should not intervene. About this argument, Fiona explains that she has taken full consideration of Adam's living environment and sees that his rejection of accepting blood transfusion is not really his own decision. The third argument is that Adam's religious faith is genuine and should be respected. About this argument, Fiona stresses that like other religions, Jehovah's Witnesses predict what is going to be like after death and that the court is not concerned about his after-life, but this life. Fiona adopts her principle of maintaining the welfare and interests of Adam saying that she is influenced by Mr. Justice Ward who has handled a similar case concerning a Jehovah's Witness teenager and that the welfare of the child is a dominant factor for her to make a decision. This is also written into *The Children Act* (1989) that emphasizes the primacy of the child's welfare. Fiona adds that the word "welfare" in her understanding encompasses "well-being" and "interests" (125). Fiona concludes that it will not promote Adam's welfare to "suffer an agonizing unnecessary death, and so become a martyr to his faith" while "assuming a good recovery, his welfare is better served by his love of poetry, by his newly found passion for the violin, by the excise of his lively intelligence and the expression of a playful, affectionate nature, and by all of life and love that lie ahead of him" (126). She further argues that the Church, the elders, Adam, and his parents made a decision contrary to Adam's welfare, while the court is going to consider his welfare as paramount primacy.

There ought to be no conflict between medical science and religion since the former is about human body while the latter is about the human soul. However, in Adam's case the conflict between them is irresolvable: the physicians are running out of time for saving his life waiting for the court to grant them permission for blood transfusion, while the Jehovah Witnesses reject the treatment with blood transfusion by adhering to their religious principles. Both parties claim that they make their decisions for Adam's welfare. In my opinion, it is their different understandings of the welfare that lead to their different ethical choices. The Jehovah's Witnesses choose to sacrifice a young and pre-

scious life to have faith in their religion, while the physicians want to save his life at the price of involving a legal dispute with Adam's parents and other Jehovah's Witnesses. In Fiona's opinion, life is a fundamental right for the welfare of the child and thus she grants permission to perform blood transfusion and rejects the Jehovah's Witnesses' request. When rendering her judgment, Fiona stresses that although she respects Adam's age, faith, and dignity, in her opinion "his life is more precious than his dignity" (127). Unexpectedly, Adam gets fascinated by Fiona when he is out of hospital, writing her one letter after another. In his letters to Fiona, Adam confesses that he has been stupid of not knowing what is in his best interest, being young and foolish. He puts the Bible away, cuts off his connection with his Church, and quarrels with his parents. Disappointed at and unhappy with his religion, Adam keeps on writing letters to Fiona hoping that he can talk to her and to stay with her. When receiving no replies from Fiona, Adam even follows her all the way from London to the District Court in Newcastle, the main purpose of which is to ask Fiona to bring him to "something really beautiful and deep" (145). At their meeting in the ward of the hospital, Adam and Fiona have talked on a variety of issues among which Yeats's poem "Down by the Salley Gardens" left on him a deepest impression. By reading poem, Adam has enriched his understanding of life. As Lu argues, "literature is essentially about the issue of how to live well" (Lu 18). Attracted to the poem "Down by the Salley Gardens," Adam is attracted to Fiona, the bringer of this poem to his life. He is longing for approaching to "something really beautiful and deep" although he does not know what it is. In light of ethical literary criticism, it refers to the ethical experience and moral enlightenment from reading literature. According to Nie, "literature is fundamentally an art of ethics ... moral enlightenment is the primary function of literature, which is realized through readers' reading and aesthetic appreciation of a given work" (Nie, Introduction 13-14). That said, it is in his reading of the poem that Adam recognizes the meaning of life and has thus found his passion for life. In other words, it is only after Adam meets Fiona and is enlightened ethically that he arrives at the ethical choice of staying with Fiona and talking with her.

When asking Adam why he followed her all the way from London to Newcastle, Fiona is surprised to find that Adam insists on saying that he hopes he could stay with Fiona, do all the housework for her and, as a return she could offer him a reading list. Adam's desire to reading can be considered a change when he starts a new life and reveals the value of literature to him. From the perspective of ethical literary criticism, it is the ethical value that helps Adam to place emphasis upon reading literary works. In Nie's opinion, "the core value of literature is not entertainment but moral education. That is, literature aims at offering readers useful knowledge of knowing society and life" ("Ethical Literary" 9). To Adam, who has just recovered from a fatal disease, it is urgent to acquire the knowledge of society and life. Therefore, Fiona has more or less has taken a role of a mentor for Adam, since she is the one who brought him the poem and opened a door of literature for him. Viewed in this light, Adam's request of a reading list from her is reasonable. According to ethical literary criticism, "literature is not only an important product of human civilization but also an essential form for human beings to receive moral enlightenment" (Nie, "Ethical Literary" 9). Thus we can interpret Adam's request of a reading list in this way: he is longing for knowledge of life from literature, since it is what he has not received from his parents and religion.

After Fiona rejects Adam's request, she receives another letter from him, which encloses a poem named "The Ballard of Adam Henry." Fiona makes a literal interpretation of this poem believing that Adam is simply angry with her and believes Adam will resume a normal life and that she will fade in his thoughts soon. Only before the moment of Fiona's Christmas party is she informed that Adam has just passed away. Hearing the news of Adam's death, Fiona feels emotional and at the party sings "Down by the Salley Gardens." Once her performance is over, Fiona retreats home and takes out Adam's last poem. Crouching down by the fire, she identifies the erased line of the poem: "May he who drowns my cross be his own hand be slain" (212). And now it is too late for her to save Adam's life and Fiona is "at the furthest extreme of grief" (218). In my interpretation Fiona has done nothing wrong: Adam's case is closed and it is perfectly fine for her not to reply his letters and to turn him away. As a judge, she has always considered the child's welfare as the most important factor. However, Fiona seems to have overlooked the fact her most important identity is human being, which in the words of Nie, is "an ethical existent" (Nie, Introduction 39). Seen in this light, Fiona's understanding of the child's welfare is limited: she tries her best to protect the children in court, but ignores them outside of the court. The death of Adam is an example revealing her limited understanding of the child's welfare. When he is alive, Adam tells Fiona that "my parents' religion was a poison and you were the antidote" (168). Hence I argue that Fiona's refusal to reply to Adam and her turning him back to his parents almost equals forcing him to take poison. In other words, it is Fiona who has played larger part in Adam's death, which accounts for her sadness and regret. Among all her self-reflections, the most important one is "she thought her responsibilities ended at the courtroom walls" (220). Fiona has been devoted to maintaining the child's welfare, which is the main reason why her marriage has been in crisis. However, her previous understanding of welfare written in the law books is limited and dogmatic in the sense that her responsibility of protecting children should not end at the courtroom walls, but should be extended to the whole of society. Apparently, what is a lack in her previous understanding of the child's welfare is an ethical perspective. In the words of Lynn Wells, we have "a natural re-

sponsibility to care for others, on whom our very existences depend," and "the moral foundation that makes society possible" (14). Despite the fact that Fiona saved Adam in the courtroom, she put him to death in society: she has no intention to do evil, but has in fact done a greater evil. I agree with Lu, who argues that "a person needs to draw a certain distance from himself, and to have a self-suspicious spirit, which is an important element of ethics" (Lu 18). Similarly, Fiona casts a doubtful light upon her former self and keeps an ethical distance from her former self accordingly. I think that Fiona's tears are not only the symbols of sadness, but also markers of regret and self-criticism. Although Fiona is approaching sixty, it is not until this moment that she realizes her ethical epiphany, so far as the child's welfare is concerned.

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- Author's profile: Biwu Shang teaches English-language literatures at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. His interests in scholarship include narrative theory, ethical literary criticism, and contemporary Anglo-American fiction. In addition to numerous articles in Chinese and English, his book publications include *In Pursuit of Narrative Dynamics: A Study of James Phelan's Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (2011) and *当代西方后经典叙事学研究* (2013) (Contemporary Western Narratology: Postclassical Perspectives). E-mail: <[biwushang@sjtu.edu.cn](mailto:biwushang@sjtu.edu.cn)>