

IS A LIFE SAVED BY A COURT ORDER REALLY A LIFE SAVED? ART AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE RENOUNCED RELIGION IN IAN MCEWAN'S *THE CHILDREN ACT*

Abstract: A contemporary British writer Ian McEwan, a committed liberal-humanist and non-believer, has been identified as a supporter and representative of the New Atheist Movement, which emerged in the wake of 9/11. Focusing on the opposing realms of religion and private life, *The Children Act* puts responsibility on the court and its judge Fiona to protect Adam from his and his parents' religion for the secular mind is the one that makes reasonable judgements as opposed to religiously inhumane canons. At the crucial moment, all but unprecedented in McEwan's, art acts as an alternative, a surrogate to religion. Religion is denounced and Adam's life is saved. Unfortunately, the deliverance is not long-lasting. Fiona offers nothing in religion's place to fill the void, defined by Viktor Frankl as an existential vacuum. On their way to proving they are self-determining, McEwan's characters, both those endowed with scientific rationalism and those endowed with artistic spirituality, continue to crave a complement, an alternative faith, their own will-to-meaning.

Key words: Ian McEwan, *The Children Act*, religion, alternative, existential vacuum, will-to-meaning, Viktor Frankl

Introduction

'...The evil I'm talking about lives in us all. It takes hold in an individual, in private lives, within a family, and then it's children who suffer most.'

Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*

At the dawn of the 21st century, the "Four Horsemen of the Non-Apocalypse" initiated a movement known as "New Atheism". Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and Daniel Dennett published best-selling books on faith, God, and delusion as their response to the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. New Atheism stood against irrationalism, religion and superstition, raising a voice against the ideological indoctrination of children. Its popularity and the attention it drew, however, had to do with the political context and cultural climate at the time, characterised by the re-emergence of religion, rather than any radically different or more profound approach to the secular being threatened by the religious. New Atheism was criticised for resembling not only its atheist predecessors, but also its main antagonist, Christian fundamentalism, especially in its absolutist appearance, thus representing a

philosophical mirror image of the monolith it rejects. However, Bradley and Tate detect a more compelling reason for its massive popular appeal, and that is the fact that New Atheism constitutes a new and powerful creation mythology that, like all mythologies, performs an implicit anthropological service (2010: 7). Indeed, science accelerated and substantially contributed to the liberation of the human race from mythology, but it seems that even the adulthood of reason and freedom of thought is in need of some grand narrative. In their own myth, which is a “hybrid combination of Enlightenment-based rationality with postmodern themes and concerns” (Kettell 2016: 1), the New Atheists warn against not only a religion’s irrationality, but, more importantly, its immorality and peril. The starting point of Sam Harris and other religious critics was the claim that modern religious tolerance resulted in people allowing delusion rather than reason to prevail (Hoffman 2014). The question the Four Horsemen are eager to answer is whether religion is the root of all evil in the world (Dawkins 2006).

One of the most committed atheists among writers is the contemporary British novelist, Ian McEwan, whose fiction does much more than simply adhere to the new secular creed; it attempts to vindicate it and proselytize on its behalf (Bradley and Tate 2010: 16). Once the master of the macabre, a rationalist who was slithering from belief to unbelief and who was not reluctant to leave some room for the spiritual realm as a complement to the scientific one, has lately inclined towards atheism, writing more introspective and humane novels, the focus of which is on political, moral, social and private choices and alternatives. It is not surprising that, as a liberal-humanist and non-believer, McEwan has been identified as a supporter and representative of the New Atheist Movement. In a 2002 interview, *Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero*, a group of people including priests, rabbis, an Islamic scholar, a Middle East expert, an English professor, a psychoanalyst, a photographer who documented Ground Zero, and McEwan himself, were asked to express their views on 9/11 and how it affected the notions of God and evil. The British novelist defined himself as an atheist: “Now, I’m an atheist. I really don’t believe for a moment that our moral sense comes from God.” However, he does not blame religion for the 9/11 attacks. Religion is, in his words, a “morally neutral force” and any acts, whether cruel or kind, should be seen from the perspective of its human, and not religious, dimension. “I mean, I don’t believe in God. I certainly don’t, therefore, believe in some sort of supernatural or trans-historical force that somehow organizes life on dark or black principles. I think there are only people behaving, and sometimes behaving monstrously. [...] But I think it’s often better to try to understand it in real terms, in... either political or psychological terms.” (McEwan 2002). In order for people to be able to commit such monstrous acts of cruelty, they need to lack the ability to identify with the people they are being cruel to, to enter into their minds and understand what it is to be them: “Amongst their crimes, is, was, a failure of imagination, of the moral imagination.” (McEwan 2002) This inconceivable dehumanization has made it hard for humanity to survive in modern societies revolving around blind obedience and being controlled by violence, where ethical rationalizations that led to the Holocaust and Hiroshima are generated and sustained (Nešić 2019: 406). Similarly to Primo

Levi, a man who survived Auschwitz and then committed suicide in 1987, McEwan warns against powerful ideologies and crazed religious certainties, which can, like charismatic shamans, seduce human instinct and blot it out (McEwan 2002). What is menacing is his firm belief that if being capable of extraordinary love and kindness is in our nature, then destruction is inherent as well.

It is the task of art, particularly literature and, more particularly, the novel, to explore human nature and try to understand its two opposing dimensions. The emergence of the novel, a marvelous product of the Enlightenment, which in McEwan's words, "has always been a secular and skeptical form" (Owen 2018), coincides with the decline of religiosity. It suffocated Biblical certitudes and offered fictional narratives instead. As "the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (Lukács 1920: 38), the novel asks for an irreligious belief, which is exactly what McEwan and his fiction insist on. In other words, what makes McEwan a New Atheist novelist is not simply the fact that he does not believe in God or any supernatural power. It is his belief, his faith in secular transcendence, reason, scientific progress, innate morality, capacity for love, in art and, above all, in the novel that defines McEwan's New Atheism.

[The novel] is the most adept at showing us what it is like to be someone else. The novel is famously good at revealing, through various literary conventions, a train of thought, a state of mind. You can live inside somebody else's head. Within one novel, you can live inside many different people's heads, in a way that you of course cannot do in normal life. I think that quality of penetration into other consciousnesses lies at the heart of its moral quest. Knowing, or sensing what it's like to be someone else I think is at the foundations of morality. (McEwan)

What the novel offers is precisely what people capable of atrocities lack: the ability to identify with others, that level of moral imagination that would, instead of blotting out their empathy, enable them to understand what it feels like to be someone else, to be a victim.

The Prose of Judgement

After having dinner with some judges, McEwan was astonished to realize how much in common a novelist and a judge have. Quite often, in the case of family division, the character of a judge, who is wholeheartedly and rationally wishing for a humane and righteous, morally correct outcome, cannot be separated from the story. That is because 'the family dimension is rooted in the same ground as fiction, where all of life's vital interests lie' (McEwan: The law versus religious belief). Their issues revolve around love and marriage, their subsequent breakdown, fortune division, unfortunate destinies of children, parental cruelty and neglect, divergence on moral grounds or religious disputes, which have penetrated every corner of their private lives. Yet, a novelist's story has that privilege to postpone reaching a verdict, to reinvent the protagonists and adjust the situations so as to give itself enough time

to properly consider the relation between the “secular spirit of the law and sincerely held faith”. On the other hand, a judge, dealing with real people, has to content themselves with adjudicating the circumstances so as to do ‘the lesser harm rather than the greater good’ and, in the family division particularly, their judgements reveal a lot of personal drama entangled with moral complexity. The possibility of different judges making different moral choices may lead to inconsistency in verdicts. When a judge has to make a value judgement (2014: 14), which will determine a child’s destiny, it turns out that their decision is inevitably influenced by their own personality, moral sense, and even their mood. Still, the most important guidance for all of them should be the opening lines of the Children Act, 1989: ‘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.’

A highly-accomplished judge in the Family Division of the High Court of Justice of England and Wales, Fiona Maye is respected and admired by her colleagues, renowned for the crisp prose of her “almost ironic, almost warm” judgements (McEwan 2014: 13). She belongs to the law “as some women had once been brides of Christ” (2014: 45). However, it seems that she has reached the pinnacle in her career, and also a nadir in her private life, almost simultaneously. The relationship with her husband, an academic named Jack, has become more like that of caring siblings than that of passionate lovers. His open announcement that he is about to have an affair, which should be accounted for by Fiona’s being too much and for too long immersed in her work, as well as by the fact that it could be his last chance to have such an experience, makes Fiona devastated. Unfortunately, there are no more chances for Fiona to change the fact that, in the pursuit of her career, she has remained childless. At the moment when differing regrets and desires are emerging on both sides of the complex interplay between professional and private life, bringing ashore a series of ethical and personal conundrums, the Judge is urgently needed to decide on the question of life or death.

Focusing on the opposing realms of religion and private life, *The Children Act* puts responsibility on the court and judge Fiona to protect Adam from his and his parents’ religion. Adam Henry is a 17-year-old boy, only three months away from his eighteenth birthday, suffering from a form of leukemia. The hospital is looking for permission to perform a blood transfusion, through which Adam would receive life-saving medication. Otherwise, the boy will die and his death would be terrible. The court must be involved since Adam and his parents are Jehovah’s Witnesses and refuse any treatment involving transfusion, which is against their reading of the Bible. The medical staff, on the other hand, are firmly opposed to losing a young patient for religious reasons. The three months that Adam has before he turns eighteen are keeping him under the court’s protection and might save his life, against his and his parents’ wish. In terms of law, anyone under eighteen is considered a child, but the closer they get to that age, the more their wishes are taken into account. Moreover, it is a fundamental right to refuse medical treatment and a criminal assault to treat someone against their will. The representatives of the various parties and expert witnesses are summoned to the Royal Courts of Justice

to present evidence and arguments to the judge. Refusing transfusion is, allegedly, Adam's decision, supported entirely by his parents and by other members of their community, who were "impressed and moved by the boy's grasp of his situation and his knowledge of the scriptures", as well as by the fact that "he knew his own mind and that he was living, as he was prepared to die, in the truth." (2014: 77). The absurdity arises from a questionable reading of some of the Bible's passages and its ostensible prohibition of transfusion, whereas the command to refuse blood transfusion actually dates from 1945. Religious dogmas have overpowered a modern and reasonable parent. "A child shouldn't go killing himself for the sake of religion," concludes a social worker (2014: 83). Similarly, the law is clear here: Adam should have no autonomy in deciding until he is eighteen. Before making her decision, Fiona suspends the proceedings in order to visit Adam in the hospital and make sure that he has not been influenced by his parents or the elders, and that the reason he is refusing this kind of treatment is not because he is frightened of being disassociated from the community, or shunned for not doing what is expected of him.

Adam Henry is indeed extremely intelligent and articulate, with a passion for reading and writing poetry, giving the impression that he knows his own mind. However, he only has a vague notion of what would happen if he refused the transfusion. And indeed, "if the worst was to happen, it would have a fantastic effect on everyone", said one of the elders while visiting Adam. "It would fill our church with love," (2014: 109). Adam recites one of his poems, in which Satan comes with a hammer and unintentionally flattens his soul into a sheet of gold that reflects God's love on everyone: Adam is dead but saved. Hearing him talk about God, transfusion and other things, Fiona begins to realise his naivety, his fresh and excitable innocence, influenced by his parents' religious belief and expectations. She feels a motherly urge to take the boy home and feed him (2014: 106). Just before she leaves, Adam takes his violin and begins to play a tune well-known to Fiona, who could have become a pianist instead of a judge. "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. [...] Hearing Adam play stirred her, even as it baffled her." (2014: 116). If getting ill made Adam write his best poetry, taking up the violin or any instrument, on the other hand, represents an act of hope, implies a future (2014: 116). Profoundly moved by Adam's performance, Fiona suggests he play it again so that this time she can sing along with him. *She bid me take life easy [...] But I was young and foolish*. The judge, despite Adam desperately wanting to stay a bit longer in His Lady's company, leaves the hospital. There is only one proper decision of the court. The needs and interests of parents and their gods are secondary to the interests of a child. The child's welfare is the paramount consideration, and no child's welfare is served by being martyred for his religion: "[Adam's] welfare is better served by his love of poetry, by his newly found passion for the violin, by the exercise of his lively intelligence and the expressions of a playful, affectionate nature, and by all of life and love that lie ahead of him. [...] He must be protected from his religion and from himself. [...] His life is more precious than his dignity." (2014: 123) The medical treatment, including blood transfusion, may proceed even without the consent of Adam and his parents. Adam is to live.

The aftermath of Fiona's judgement begins to unfold. Her personal involvement and visiting Adam in the hospital, who, maybe for the first time, had someone with whom he could share his love of poetry and music, will have a momentous effect on his future, once he is saved by the court. Although for Fiona, her personal involvement comes to an end after she has given her decision, for Adam, it seems to have just begun. Fascinated by Fiona, who crossed London in order to show him that his fate is not in the hands of some impersonal bureaucracy, but of a responsible judge, a connoisseur of poetry and music, who understands him and respects his opinion, and who intends to maintain his best interests, he starts writing her one letter after another, in which he confesses his previous ignorance, his being young and foolish, and his gratitude to her. He eagerly informs her about his parents crying for joy by his bed, hugging him and "praising God" for having their son alive without any of them being disassociated since it was not their decision, not their fault. Adam's cutting connection with his Church, moving the Bible out of his room, being disillusioned with religion, overall led to quarrels with his parents (2014: 138). He states his need to talk with Fiona: "I feel you've brought me close to something else, something really beautiful and deep but I don't really know what it is." (2014: 139). However, he receives no reply as Fiona decides not to post her note. Unhappy and desperate, not having the one thing he had previously had – his religion – to cling to, Adam even follows her all the way to Newcastle to thank her for saving him and changing him. His whole world the before hospital, "all the hours of his childhood and teenage years, of praying, hymns, sermons, and various constraints [...] at the tight and loving community that had sustained him until it had almost killed him" (2014: 162). Everything collapsed, but "it collapsed into the truth" (2014: 164). What Adam, blinded by religion, was not aware of was "all of life and love that [lay] ahead of him." Their song, 'The Sally Gardens' and her judgement were his revelation. He is totally and wholeheartedly into art: he plays Bach, reads Berryman, is going to appear in a school play and is full of Yeats. He has renounced his faith, he has lost his tooth fairy and does not want another. What he wants is to come and live with Fiona, to do all kinds of jobs for her only to be given reading lists in return. An insane and innocent plea (2014: 167).

When readmitted to the hospital in need of another transfusion as his leukemia returned, Adam, now old enough to decide for himself, refuses treatment and dies for his beliefs, whatever they are, or, more possibly, for the lack of them. Crouching down by the fire, Fiona reads "The ballad of Adam Henry", a poem enclosed in Adam's last letter, sent after their last encounter. Now she is able to grasp the meaning and discern the last, apparently missing, line: "May he who drowns my cross by his own hand be slain." (2014: 204). Fiona becomes overwhelmed with extreme grief, repentance for not hearing Adam's cry for help, and helplessness at the fact that she is to remain childless.

Religion – Reason – Art: Frankl's existential vacuum

In the course of Fiona Maye's career, the case of Adam Henry is not simply another case involving the conflicts between religion and the law, nor is it another case in which the ethical views of a child's welfare could be separated from the private, marital turmoil and ethics. Depicting the private and professional crises, McEwan confronts his characters with ethical alternatives that could change the course of their lives. At first, Fiona seems to act as a highly responsible and moral human being, considering the child's welfare the utmost priority, at least as long as she is formally in charge of the case. Once the case is closed, for her but obviously not for Adam, she chooses not to reply to his letters. She has saved his life, opened the doors of poetry to his young, innocent and romantic soul, thus helping him enrich his understanding of life and encouraging him to find passion for life. His desire to read and write poetry, as well as play the violin, represents a solid foundation for a new life, and not the afterlife his religion promises. At the crucial moment, all but unprecedented in McEwan, art acts as an alternative, a surrogate to religion: religion is renounced and Adam's life is saved. If the aim of literature is to help us identify with others and see what it is like to be someone else, then for Adam, art is the source from which he can draw knowledge of society and life, which religion obscured and failed to offer. However, in order to feed on it, Adam needs a mentor, his judge, his Lady, earthly saviour, an antidote to his parents' religion, and a mother-like figure who gave him the second birth. His request for reading lists is, therefore, quite reasonable: he needs to be nursed by it in order to grow and flourish. From this perspective, Fiona's understanding of the child's welfare is limited (Shang 2015: 7). It does not go beyond the court and her jurisdiction. Once the judge's gavel fell, the welfare of Adam ceased to be her concern, as she ignores a natural responsibility to take care of the ones in need outside the professional sphere.

What used to be the lodging of religious beliefs has turned into a void referred to as an "existential vacuum" by Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, philosopher, the founder of logotherapy, and Holocaust survivor. The APA dictionary defines existential vacuum as "the inability to find or create meaning in life, leading to feelings of emptiness, alienation, futility, and aimlessness". In Frankl's words, "a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century" caused by "a twofold loss which man has had to undergo since he became a truly human being" (Frankl 1992: 48). The first one is the loss of animal instincts, which would tell man what he has to do, whereas the other one is the loss of tradition, which would tell him what he ought to do. Man is so bewildered that sometimes he does not even know what it is that he wishes to do: "Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism) or he does what other people tell him to do (totalitarianism)." (1992: 48). In the pursuit of meaning, one might have to face spiritual or existential neurosis, experiencing their lives as purposeless and meaningless. Quite often, their behaviour hurts themselves and/or others. If meaning is what we are after, then there is some hole within us, an emptiness in our lives. It is important to find meaning before malevolent things start

filling the vacuum. There are three approaches to finding meaning. First, through *experiential values* – by experiencing something or someone we value, be it great art or a beloved person. Seeing love as “the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire” (1992: 21). Frankl says that through our love, we can enable our beloved to develop meaning, thus developing meaning of our own life: “The salvation of man is through love and in love.” Second, through *creative values* – by doing a deed, becoming involved, expressing creativity through art, music, writing, invention, and so on. Third, through *attitudinal values*, such as compassion, bravery, and even suffering as long as it is endured with dignity, and this is possible only if some meaning is attached to it. Even in concentration camps, the ultimate examples of man’s inhumanity, only those who held on to a vision of the future, which was either a certain task or a beloved person awaiting their return, had a chance to survive. However, what Frankl emphasizes is the fact that meaning must be found and cannot be given, it “is something to discover rather than to invent” (Frankl 1975: 112). It is throughout the course of this discovery, while striving for meaning, that man determines himself: “whether he gives in to conditions or stands up to them” (1992: 59). Defining man as ultimately self-determining, Frankl puts responsibility on the human race, as man is not there only to exist, but, by constantly choosing among the alternatives, to decide on the attitude in any given set of circumstances, to decide what his existence will be, “what [man] will become in the next moment”.

Frankl relates God and religion to the ultimate meaning. The notion of the unconscious God describes a built-in orientation or goal of existence, or even, in that sense, the goal of one’s will-to-meaning, which “orients and directs existence in its choices and rejections of actions on the basis of whether they have value” (Ryan 2019: 65). *The Children Act* is an introspective novel, which juxtaposes the eminent and intimate life of a renowned High Court Family Division judge, who is “an abandoned fifty-nine-year-old woman, in the infancy of old age, just learning to crawl” (2014: 43), which Fiona Maye describes herself as she is headed from her home to work, playing Bach’s C minor keyboard partita in her head. The appearance of Adam’s case in her career coincides with the temporary disappearance of her once loyal and kind husband, now in pursuit of an affair. Despite his unsettling and ambiguous role, Adam is not introduced as a substitute for Jack, nor for one of the children that she might have had and whose absence she starts to feel and regret, admitting her own guilt in single-mindedly pursuing her career. The subsequent encounters with Adam and his death are the pivot for Fiona to examine her life beyond the small topography of the Inns of Court and Royal Courts of Justice, by which it is largely bound (Rich 2018). One of the recurring thoughts during the frequent moments of is the sacrifice of carefreeness and, once married, of intimacy, that her vocation and her dedication to work have always demanded. From her teenage years to her sixtieth year, she has risked nothing in life beyond a few reckless episodes in Newcastle (2014: 212). The culmination of this tension between her more than successful professional life and regrets about her almost vain private life represents the impulsive kiss with which she and Adam part upon his unexpected appearance in Newcastle. Even at that moment, Fiona’s anxiousness is about not Adam’s feelings and the aftermath of her act, but the

possibility of her being exposed to a charge of judicial misconduct. Unfortunately, the revelation and epiphany have to emerge in the form of Adam's death in order for her to be able to see things clearly and recognize her own responsibility for them, to become aware that 'her transgression lay beyond the reach of any disciplinary panel' since her responsibility for decisions of life and death, as a judge, is confined to the courtroom, but, as a human, reaches far beyond it. With the quiet confession of deeper private grief and personal failings (Rich 2018), Fiona's life, both the eminent and the private one, is to resume, with new opportunities to discern and find values and meaning.

Conclusion

Behind the obvious conflict between religion and science, there is a shrouded clash of the moral alternatives that should have been or may be taken, based on which the characters' personalities and lives get unravelled. *The Children Act* puts adult responsibility and the choices they make when faced with different alternatives on trial. Allowing children, even one's own children, to die by refusing medical help on religious grounds is "utterly perverse and inhumane", as McEwan said at the Oxford Literary Festival. It is important that in such cases, it is the secular mind, not the religious one, that should decide and be followed. Defined by Sigmund Freud as an illusion rooted in the terrifying impression of helplessness endured during childhood (Freud 1927: 16), religious belief encourages devotees to imagine a heavenly father, which would help them "to incorporate the infantile wish for security, justice and everlasting life into their adult lives and thus evade the shattering insight of their true helplessness and insignificance" (Wally 2012: 107). On their way to proving they are self-determining, McEwan's characters, both those endowed with scientific rationalism and those endowed with artistic spirituality, continue to crave a complement, or an alternative faith, for their own will-to-meaning. Unlike the prisoners surviving the concentration camps, Adam had nothing to hold on to. Fiona did not recognize the emptiness of the hole within him, the existential vacuum he was asking to fill. Not wanting to step out of the court, she did not fulfil her social responsibilities, the welfare of the child being one of them. For a moment it seems that art, with its transforming power and redeeming effect, will be the instrument of salvation for Adam, as it was for some of the protagonists from previous novels. It kept the doors of a new life wide open to him. He was offered, instead of death, all of life and love and protection against his religion, but "without faith, how open and beautiful and terrifying the world must have seen to him." (2014: 212). Unfortunately, the deliverance was not long-lasting. Left all alone to find the meaning, which he once was given, and now was deprived of. Then innocent and naive, Adam got lost. Fiona failed to recognize Adam's needs, "failed to decipher the warnings in his poem". He kept coming back to her "wanting what everyone wanted, and what only free-thinking people, not the supernatural could offer. Meaning." (2014: 213) Having saved his life in the courtroom, Fiona

did nothing to keep him alive in society. Having taken away his religion from him, Fiona, although aware that everyone needs tooth fairies, failed to provide any for Adam and fill the void.

If it is indeed possible to draw an analogy between a novelist and a judge, based on the likeness of their prose, as Ian McEwan claimed, and if it is indeed true that literary imagination enables readers to step outside their own world, inhabit the minds of others, identify with the protagonists, and thus realize what it is like to be them. Again, as McEwan claimed, why then was Fiona Maye, renowned for her intellect, alertness and profundity of her judgments, not able to penetrate Adam's mind and use her own prose as a source of ethical reflection? Why has she not been able to envisage the devastating and irrevocable effects that her not replying to Adam's letters could have on his life? What was in the domain of reason, the supreme supervisor of her professional life, was impeccable. What she lacked had to do with her imagination, which compromised her ability to feel empathy. Although Fiona is approaching sixty, with an abundantly productive and fruitful career, this is the first time she experiences ethical epiphany caused by her indirect complicity in the termination of the life which she so eagerly struggled to save in the court. If the prose of her judgement, which, read by Adam, encouraged him to renounce his religion as a hypocritical impediment to truth and embrace life, can be viewed, in a similar way to the novel, as a deeply moral form, the perfect medium for entering the minds of other people, then, deprived of it, Adam had little chance to rise above life's circumstances and transcend his personal environment as his will lacked meaningfulness. The paramount consideration of the child's welfare disappeared somewhere in between the fear of tarnishing her reputation by an impulsive and reckless kiss and the inability to empathise, caused by the overwhelming dominance of reason. Fiona's absolute reliance on reason has brought her to a glittering career, but along the way, left her childless and triggered her not to keep the child she literally gave a second birth to.

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**DA LI JE ŽIVOT SPASEN SUDSKOM PRESUDOM ZAISTA
SPASEN? UMETNOST KAO ALTERNATIVA ODBAČENOJ
RELIGIJI U MAKJUANOVOM ROMANU *ZAKON O DECI***

Rezime

Savremeni britanski pisac Ijan Makjuan, posvećeni liberalni humanista i ateista, jedan je od pristalica i predstavnika Novog ateističkog pokreta, nastalog kao reakcija na teroristički napad 11. septembra 2001. godine. Usredsređujući se na suprotna područja religije i privatnog života, *Zakon o deci* dodeljuje odgovornost Sudu i sudiji Fioni da zaštite Adama od njegove i religije njegovih roditelja, s obzirom da upravo sekularni um, a ne verski nehumani kanoni, donosi razumne presude. U presudnom trenutku, što kod Makjuana nije nikako presedan, umetnost se nudi kao alternativa, zamena religije: religija se odbacuje i Adamov život spasava. Nažalost, izbavljenje nije dugotrajno. Fiona ne nudi ništa namesto religije da popuni prazninu koju je Viktor Frankl definisao kao egzistencijalni vakuum. Na putu da dokažu da su samoodređeni, Makjuanovi likovi, kako oni obdareni naučnim racionalizmom, tako i oni obdareni umetničkom duhovnošću, i dalje žude za dopunom, alternativnom verom, sopstvenom voljom za značenjem.

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