



***The Children Act, by Ian McEwan***  
***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, February 2015***

Ian McEwan's novel, *The Children Act*, is set in contemporary London. Fiona Maye, a British High Court Judge, renders decisions on complex child-court trials. In one case involving conjoined twins, she allows risky surgery to go forth, even though one child would not survive the operation. Fiona's aloof, cool nature keeps her detached from difficult cases.

However, at 59 ("the infancy of old age"), Fiona faces a crisis of her own. She and her husband, Jack, a classics professor—childless by choice—have had a comfortable marriage of 35 years. But now Jack announces that because Fiona lacks "passion" about life, he wants to embark on an extramarital affair with a younger colleague.

To counter the collapse of her marriage, Fiona delves into the next case on her docket. Adam Henry, a 17-year-old boy suffering from leukemia, needs a blood transfusion to save life. His parents, staunch Jehovah's Witnesses, strongly object to the procedure. According to the tenets of their religion, they maintain, no foreign substance can be injected into one's body. Adam, it appears, agrees with his parents.

A court-ordered guardian is appointed, and the case goes to trial. Fiona is keenly aware that The Children Act of 1989 has made children's welfare a top priority of English courts. When Adam is called to testify, Fiona is impressed by his intelligence and his commitment to his parents and to their religious beliefs. In her deliberations, she must balance her own growing affection for the boy with Adam's determination to adhere to his religion.

As with all McEwan's novels, *The Children Act* has the author's signature plot-twist at the end. And while not nearly as clever as some of his earlier books, *The Children Act* is nevertheless a topical and timely read.