

Surname Name Date,

From Ian McEwan, The Children Act, pp. 179-181

"Two days passed before she opened the envelope again. It was ten in the evening. Jack was at another lecture on sedimentary layers, or so he said, and she preferred to believe him. She lay on her couch and spread the torn sheet on her lap. It looked to her like doggerel¹ of the birthday card variety. Then she forced herself into a more accepting state of mind. It was a ballad, after all, and he was only eighteen.

THE BALLAD OF ADAM HENRY

I took my wooden cross and dragged it by the stream.
I was young and foolish and troubled by a dream
That penitence was folly and burdens were for fools.
But I'd been told on Sundays to live life by the rules.

The splinters² cut my shoulder, that cross was heavy as lead,
My life was narrow and godly and I was almost dead,
The stream was merry and dancing and sunlight danced around,
But I must keep on walking, with eyes fixed on the ground.

Then a fish rose out of the water with rainbows on its scales³.
Pearls of water were dancing and hung in silvery trails.
"Throw your cross in the water if you're wanting to be free!"
So I drowned my load in the river in the shade of the Judas tree.

I knelt by the banks of that river in a wondrous state of bliss
While she leaned upon my shoulder and gave the sweetest kiss.
But she dived to the icy bottom where she never will be found,
And I was full of tears until I heard the trumpets sound.

And Jesus stood on the water and this he said to me,
"That fish was the voice of Satan, and you must pay the fee.
Her kiss was the kiss of Judas, her kiss betrayed my name.
May he

May he what? The last words of the final verse were lost to a skein⁴ of spidery lines that looped around second thoughts, to words deleted and reinstated and to other variants with question marks. Rather than attempt to decipher the mess, she read the poem again, then lay back with eyes closed. She minded that he was angry with her, casting her as Satan, and began to daydream a letter to him, knowing that she would never post it, or even write it. Her impulse was to appease⁵ him as well as justify herself. She summoned flat ready-made phrases. *I had to send you away. It was in your own best interests. You have your own young life to lead.* Then, more coherently, *Even if we had the room, you could not be our lodger. Such a thing is simply not possible for a judge.* She added, *Adam, I'm not Judas. An old trout perhaps...* This last to lighten a fierce self-justifying intent."

Analyse of the extract above to write an argumentative text that makes **its function in the economy of the novel clear to the reader**.

Make sure you consider: structure, characterisation/s, narrative technique/s, point/s of view, and use/s of language.

¹ Doggerel= poetry or verse that is silly or poorly written.

² Splinter = small, thin, sharp piece of wood, bone, etc., split off from the main body: *He used a needle to remove the splinter from his finger.*

³ Scale =] any thin, flat piece that peels off from a surface, such as the skin.

⁴ Skein = succession of similar things:

⁵ to appease= to bring to a state of calm; pacify: *to appease an angry parent with apologies.*