

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 26
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Your main commentary should be focused on *the expression of negation*. Other topics may also be addressed.

As with many gifted people, a moment came when Fanshawe was no longer satisfied with doing what came easily to him. Having mastered all that was demanded of him at an early age, it was probably natural that he should begin to look for challenges elsewhere. Given the limitations of his life as a high school student in a smart town, the fact that he found that elsewhere inside himself is neither surprising nor unusual. But there was more to it than that, I believe. Things happened around that time in Fanshawe's family that no doubt made a difference, and it would be wrong not to mention them. Whether they made an essential difference is another story, but I tend to think that everything counts. In the end, each life is no more than the sum of contingent facts, a chronicle of chance intersections, of flukes, of random events that divulge nothing but their own lack of purpose.

When Fanshawe was sixteen, it was discovered that his father had cancer. For a year and a half he watched his father die, and during that time the family slowly unravelled. Fanshawe's mother was perhaps hardest hit. Stoically keeping up appearances, attending to the business of medical consultations, financial arrangements, and trying to maintain the household, she swung fitfully between great optimism over the chances of recovery and a kind of paralytic despair. According to Fanshawe, she was never able to accept the one inevitable fact that kept staring her in the face. She knew what was going to happen, but she did not have the strength to admit that she knew, and as time went on she began to live as though she were holding her breath. Her behaviour became more and more eccentric: all-night binges of manic house-cleaning, a fear of being in the house alone (combined with sudden, unexplained absences from the house), and a whole range of imagined ailments (allergies, high blood pressure, dizzy spells). Toward the end, she started taking an interest in various crackpot theories – astrology, psychic phenomena, vague spiritualist notions about the soul – until it became impossible to talk to her without being worn down to silence as she lectured on the corruption of the

35 human body.

Relations between Fanshawe and his mother became tense. She clung to him for support, acting as though the family's pain belonged only to her. Fanshawe had to be the solid one in the house; not only did he have to take care of himself, he had to assume responsibility for his sister, who was just twelve at the time. But this brought with it another set of problems – for Ellen was a troubled, unstable child, and in the parental void that ensued from the illness she began to look to Fanshawe for everything. He became her father, her mother, her bastion of wisdom and comfort. Fanshawe understood how unhealthy her dependence on him was, but there was little he could do about it short of hurting her in some irreparable way. I remember how my own mother would talk about 'poor Jane' (Mrs Fanshawe) and how terrible the whole thing was for the 'baby'. But I knew that in some sense it was Fanshawe who suffered the most. It was just that he never got a chance to show it.

As for Fanshawe's father, there is little I can say with any certainty. He was a cipher to me, a silent man of abstracted benevolence, and I never got to know him well. Whereas my father tended to be around a lot, especially on the weekends, Fanshawe's father was rarely to be seen. He was a lawyer of some prominence, and at one time he had had political ambitions – but these had ended in a series of disappointments. He usually worked until late, pulling into the driveway at eight or nine o'clock, and often spent Saturday and part of Sunday at his office. I doubt that he ever knew quite what to make of his son, for he seemed to be a man with little feeling for children, someone who had lost all memory of having been a child himself.