

# Emotional truth essay sample



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Three specific passages taken from DH Lawrence's short story "Second Best" can be used to show how Lawrence portrays emotional truth in his work, and what particular effects the author gains by the employment of this method. Lawrence contributed to the development of the modern short story by following the post Chekhov approach, which excludes high drama and easy snap endings. Instead, he focuses on moments of personal revelation in the same way as James Joyce did with his 'epiphanies'. He also features symbolism and a flexible prose style which changes according to its subject. His central theme is personal and sexual relationships and dramas acted out in those parts of the English class system which had been previously left unexamined. (Mantex, 2006).

All of this is clear in "Second Best", a short story which extends to only a few pages long, and features only three speaking characters, although others are mentioned in the text, yet the piece manages to reveal an awakening, through the emotions of anger and longing, in the older girl, Frances. Lawrence is excellent at expressing language through speech and intonation. As we read, we can almost "hear" the accent and dialect being employed. This conveys emotion to the reader very effectively. These emotions show how variable and changeable the girl's character is, and how the use of them allows her to get at the truth of what she wants, no matter what or who is used to get there.

Initially, we are introduced to the characters of the two girls. In the first few paragraphs, Frances is portrayed as being a somewhat flighty, changeable girl who is used to getting what she wants. We are told that it is she who is the beauty and the clever child of the family. The younger girl, Anne, for all

her bravado and strength, does not always get her way over her older sister. The following passage, in which Frances speaks after Anne's comment that Frances is likely to be tired after having traveled a long way from Liverpool the day before, is very revealing about the characters of both girls:

"It's not the journey", she said, objecting to Anne's obtuseness. Anne looked enquiringly at her darling. The young girl, in her self-confident, practical way, proceeded to reckon up this whimsical creature. But suddenly she found herself full in the eyes of Frances; felt two hectic eyes flaring challenge at her, and she shrunk away. Frances was peculiar for these great, expressed looks, which disconcerted people by their violence and suddenness".

(Lawrence, 1955)

This suggests that Frances, who puts herself across as whimsical and somewhat weak, is used to getting her way, even with people who are as strong as her sister, Anne. It seems she is game for a challenge and likes to win them. It also tells us something about Anne: Although she is self-confident and practical; in the face of a challenge she will back away. The appearance of the mole, which is caught deftly and proficiently by Anne, is also an important part of the story. It is the vehicle by which both girls' characters are allowed to change - it is the facilitator of emotional truth.

Neither girl had any personal desire to kill the mole until something occurred to anger them. DH Lawrence expresses the idea here that anger will allow one to do things which we would not normally do in any other circumstance. Anne felt that the mole should die, as they were considered to be pests, but had decided to take it home for her father to kill it, until it bit her. Angered

by this, she commits an impulsive act – by killing it herself with one blow from her sister’s walking cane. Her anger dissipates after this act, but the killing of the mole does not go unnoticed by Tom Smedley, something which is seen with interest by Frances.

Frances is a seductress who will use emotional truth to get what she wants. Frances has set her heart upon marriage, but her first choice of marriage partner, Jimmy Barrass, has now become unavailable through engagement to someone else. Her character is further revealed to us by Lawrence in how he portrays the way in which Frances goes about the seduction of Tom, after whom the story is entitled – second best:

“ Frances knew what she was about. Tom was ready to love her as soon as she would show him. Now that she could not have Jimmy, she did not poignantly care. Still, she would have something. If she could not have the best – Jimmy, who she knew to be something of a snob – she would have the second best, Tom. She advanced rather indifferently.” (Lawrence, 1955)

A discourse follows; wherein it becomes quite clear that Tom considers it necessary for moles to be killed as, according to him, they do a lot of damage. Frances has angered him by suggesting, obliquely, that it may not be necessary to kill moles, and thus undermining him and his way of living. Frances realizes that for her plan of marrying Tom to succeed, some form of rather drastic action will be needed. For emotional truth to triumph, she reverts to the original facilitator of this – a mole.

To just what extent Frances will go in order to accomplish what she wants is revealed to us in a passage on the last page of the story. “ And the next day,  
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after a secret, persistent hunt, she found another mole playing in the heat. She killed it, and in the evening when Tom came to the gate to smoke his pipe after supper, she took him the dead creature.

“ Here you are then! she said.

“ Did you catch it?” he replied, taking the velvet corpse into his fingers and examining it minutely. This was to hide his trepidation.” (Lawrence, 1955)

This word, trepidation, and the further, doubtful question asked by Tom: “ Shall you go out wi’me?” he asked, in a difficult, troubled voice” (Lawrence, 1955) reveal to us that Tom knows he is helpless, he is trapped. If Frances will go to such lengths to get what she wants, what chance does he have of avoiding this? Tom is right to be scared. But again, emotional truth triumphs – Tom’s love for Frances, revealed once again when he saw the frail winsome nape of her neck, overcomes, and he makes his final submission when he acknowledges: “ We s’ll have to tell your mother”. (Lawrence, 1955)

This paper discussed the style of DH Lawrence and how he makes use of emotional truth in one particular story, “ Second Best”, by focusing on three particular passages which appear in that story and motivating how they facilitate the revealing of emotional truth. DH Lawrence uses this emotional truth to gain dramatic effect.

#### Works Cited

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