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decides what to include and what to leave out. His story reflects both his parents' points of view: the focus on both characters and events, both romance and history. In telling Phil's story, he tells the story of a time, re-creating a Depression-era struggle of a man who could have made it big but wound up a failure; however, he also recounts a story about people, a romantic, sentimentalized story of lost love. And, he tells a story about his own parents.

The narrator, like Phil, is creative; he needs to convey the facts of the story, but he must struggle to resist the temptation to add to them—to add more about how Phil went about writing the song, "maybe show him whistling the tune and going over the words slowly and carefully to get the best ones" (214-15), more about the romance itself. The narrator is

clearly embellishing the story—for instance, when he says everyone knew Phil and the girl would get married because "you could see it in their eyes" (215), he admits that this detail is not in his father's version of the story—but he is careful to identify his own contributions, explaining, "I couldn't help putting it in there" (215). The narrator cannot help wondering about the parts his father did not tell, and he struggles to avoid rewriting the story to include them. Sometimes he cannot help himself, and he apologizes for his lapses with a phrase like "I have to break in here [. . .]" (214). But, for the most part, the narrator knows his place, knows it is not really his story to tell:

Narrator's
perspective
continued

Watts 5

"I wish I could put more in, especially about the song and how it felt to Phil to sing it and how the girl felt when hearing it and knowing it was hers, but I've already intruded too much in a simple story that isn't even mine" (215).

Phil's story is, as the narrator acknowledges, a simple one, almost a cliché. But Gary Gildner's story, "Sleepy Time Gal," is more complex. In it, three characters create and re-create a story of love and loss, ambition and failure, all contributing the details they feel should be stressed and, in the process, revealing something about themselves and about their own hopes and dreams.

Conclusion
reinforces
thesis

Carla's paper focuses on the story's shifting point of view and the contributions of the three central characters to Phil's story. She supports her thesis with specific references to "Sleepy Time Gal"—in the form of quotation, summary, and paraphrase—and interprets the story's events in light of the points she is making. Her paper does not include every idea in her notes, nor should it: she selects only those details that support her thesis.

53d Writing about Poetry

When you write a paper about poetry, you follow the same process discussed in 53c. However, you concentrate on the elements poets use to create and enrich their work—for example, voice, form, sound, meter, language, and tone.

✓ CHECKLIST: WRITING ABOUT POETRY

- ✓ **Voice** Who is the poem's speaker? What is the speaker's attitude toward the poem's subject? How would you characterize the speaker's tone?
- ✓ **Word Choice and Word Order** What words seem important? Why? What does each word say? What does it suggest? Are any words repeated? Why? Is the poem's diction formal or informal? Is the arrangement of words conventional or unconventional?
- ✓ **Imagery** What images are used in the poem? To what senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch) do they appeal? Is one central image important? Why? Is there a pattern of related images?
- ✓ **Figures of Speech** Does the poet use simile? Metaphor? Personification? What do figures of speech contribute to the poem?
- ✓ **Sound** Does the poem include rhyme? Where? Does it have regular meter (that is, a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables)? Does the poem include repeated consonant or vowel sounds? What do these elements contribute to the poem?
- ✓ **Form** Is the poem written in open form (with no definite pattern of line length, rhyme, or meter) or in closed form (conforming to a pattern)? Why do you think this kind of form is used?
- ✓ **Theme** What central theme or themes does the poem explore?

Daniel Johanssen, a student in an introductory literature course, followed this process as he planned an essay about Delmore Schwartz's 1959 poem "The True-Blue American," which follows. Daniel's essay appears on pages 740–42. (Note that because all students in the class selected poems from the same text, Daniel's instructor did not require a Works Cited page.)

THE TRUE-BLUE AMERICAN

Jeremiah Dickson was a true-blue American,
 For he was a little boy who understood America, for he felt that he must
 Think about *everything*; because that's *all* there is to think about,
 Knowing immediately the intimacy of truth and comedy,
 Knowing intuitively how a sense of humor was a necessity
 For one and for all who live in America. Thus, natively, and
 Naturally when on an April Sunday in an ice cream parlor Jeremiah
 Was requested to choose between a chocolate sundae and a banana split
 He answered unhesitatingly, having no need to think of it
 Being a true-blue American, determined to continue as he began:
 Rejecting the either-or of Kierkegaard,¹ and many another European;
 Refusing to accept alternatives, refusing to believe the choice of between;
 Rejecting selection; denying dilemma; electing absolute affirmation:
 knowing

in his breast

The infinite and the gold

Of the endless frontier, the deathless West.

"Both: I will have them both!" declared this true-blue American
 In Cambridge, Massachusetts, on an April Sunday, instructed

By the great department stores, by the Five-and-Ten,
 Taught by Christmas, by the circus, by the vulgarity and grandeur of
 Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon,

Tutored by the grandeur, vulgarity, and infinite appetite gratified and
 Shining in the darkness, of the light

On Saturdays at the double bills of the moon pictures,
 The consummation of the advertisements of the imagination of the light
 Which is as it was—the infinite belief in infinite hope—
 of Columbus, Barnum, Edison, and Jeremiah Dickson.

¹Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)—Danish philosopher who greatly influenced twentieth-century existentialism. *Either-Or* (1841) is one of his best-known works.

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Daniel Johanssen

Professor Stang

English 1001

8 April 2001

Paper title is
centered

Irony in "The True-Blue American"

Title of poem
is in quotation
marks

The poem "The True-Blue American" by Delmore Schwartz is not as simple and direct as its title suggests. In

fact, the title is extremely ironic. At first, the poem seems patriotic, but actually the flag-waving strengthens the speaker's criticism. Even though the poem seems to support and celebrate America, it is actually a bitter critique of the negative aspects of American culture.

Thesis
statement

According to the speaker, the primary problem with America is that its citizens falsely believe themselves to be authorities on everything. The following lines introduce the theme of the "know-it-all" American: "For he was a little boy

Slash
separates
lines of
poetry

who understood America, for he felt that he must / Think about everything; because that's all there is to think about"

Parenthetical
documentation
indicates line
numbers

(2-3). This theme is developed later in a series of parallel phrases that seem to celebrate the value of immediate intuitive knowledge and a refusal to accept or to believe anything other than what is American (4-6).

Americans are ambitious and determined, but these qualities are not seen in the poem as virtues. According to the speaker, Americans reject sophisticated "European" concepts

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like doubt and choices and alternatives and instead insist on "absolute affirmation" (13)—simple solutions to complex problems. This unwillingness to compromise translates into stubbornness and materialistic greed. This tendency is illustrated by the boy's asking for both a chocolate sundae and a banana split at the ice cream parlor—not "either-or" (11). Americans are characterized as pioneers who want it all, who will stop at nothing to achieve "The infinite and the gold / Of the endless frontier, the deathless West" (16-17). For the speaker, the pioneers and their "endless frontier" are not noble or self-sacrificing; they are like a greedy little boy at an ice cream parlor.

According to the speaker, the greed and materialism of America began as grandeur but ultimately became mere vulgarity. Similarly, the "true-blue American" is not born a vulgar parody of grandeur; he learns it from his true-blue fellows:

More than 3
lines of poetry
are set off
from text.
Quotation is
indented
10 spaces
(or 1") from
margin; no
quotation
marks are
used.

instructed

By the great department stores, by the Five-
and-Ten,

Taught by Christmas, by the circus, by the vulgarity
and grandeur of

Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon,

Tutored by the grandeur, vulgarity, and infinite
appetite gratified [. . .]. (19-23)

Among the "tutors" the speaker lists are such American
institutions as department stores and national monuments.

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Within these institutions, grandeur and vulgarity coexist; in a sense, they are one and the same.

The speaker's negativity climaxes in the phrase "Shining in the darkness, of the light" (24). This paradoxical statement suggests the negative truths hidden beneath America's glamorous surface. All the grand and illustrious things of which Americans are so proud are personified by Jeremiah Dickson, the spoiled brat in the ice cream parlor.

Like America, Jeremiah has unlimited potential. He has native intuition, curiosity, courage, and a pioneer spirit. Unfortunately, however, both America and Jeremiah Dickson are limited by their willingness to be led by others, by their greed and impatience, and by their preference for quick, easy, unambiguous answers rather than careful philosophical analysis. Regardless of his—and America's—potential, Jeremiah Dickson is doomed to be hypnotized and seduced by glittering superficialities, light without substance, and to settle for the "double bills of the moon pictures" (25) rather than the enduring truths of a philosopher like Kierkegaard.

Conclusion
reinforces
thesis

53e Writing about Drama

When you write a paper about a play, you focus on the special conventions of drama. Here, for example, you might consider not just the play's plot and characters but also its staging.

✓ CHECKLIST: WRITING ABOUT DRAMA

- ✓ **Plot** What happens in the play? What conflicts are developed? How are they resolved? Are there any subplots? What events, if any, occur offstage?
- ✓ **Character** Who are the major characters? The minor characters? What relationships exist among them? What are their most distinctive traits? What do we learn about characters from their words and actions? From the play's stage directions? From what other characters tell us? Does the main character change or grow during the course of the play? What motivates the characters?
- ✓ **Staging** When and where is the play set? How do the scenery, props, costumes, lighting, and music work together to establish this setting? What else do these elements contribute to the play?
- ✓ **Theme** What central theme or themes does the play explore?

Kimberly Allison, a student in an introductory literature class, was assigned to write a short paper on one element—plot, character, staging, or theme—in a one-act play. She chose to write about the characters in Susan Glaspell's 1916 play *Trifles*. Her completed paper, annotated to highlight some conventions of writing about drama, appears on pages 744–48. (Note that because all students in the class selected plays from the same text, Kimberly's instructor did not require a Works Cited page.)