CAPITOLO

5

Dark Romance in America: Poe, Hawthorne and Melville

"All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream." — Edgar Allan Poe, "A Dream Within a Dream" (1849)

OBIETTIVI

1. I can describe the United States between 1830 and 1861 — westward expansion, the removal of Native nations, immigration, whaling and the Puritan memory of New England.
2. I can explain the American Renaissance, Transcendentalism and Dark Romanticism, and outline the work of Poe, Hawthorne and Melville.
3. I can analyse an unreliable narrator in Poe, the symbol of the scarlet letter and Ishmael's opening voice, and compare Poe with Tarchetti.
4. I can read, build and break up complex noun phrases, with adjectives in the right order and compound adjectives.
5. I can give a book talk, write a pitch and a screenplay scene, and use the pause before an INVALSI listening task.

INDICE DEL CAPITOLO

5.1 History and Society: The Young Republic, 1830–1861 2

5.2 Literature: An American Literature, Bright and Dark 6

5.3 Texts: Three Dark Openings 9

5.4 Language: Complex Noun Phrases 13

5.5 Skills: Fear on the Page and on the Screen 17

5.6 Connections: Poe and the Scapigliatura; the Dark Night Sky 23

English 5 · Parte II · America and Empire · versione 1.0
Capitolo 5: Dark Romance in America: Poe, Hawthorne and Melville · pagine 153–184 del volume completo · estratto per lo studio

On 18 October 1851 a London publisher brought out a three-volume novel called *The Whale*. Four weeks later it appeared in New York in one volume, with a new title: *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. Its author, Herman Melville, was thirty-two and had already published five books drawn from his years at sea. This one, he told his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne, was “a wicked book”. Most reviewers were puzzled, and sales were poor. Today *Moby-Dick* is often called the great American novel.

This chapter crosses the Atlantic. English 4 left the United States in 1783, when Britain recognised its independence (English 4, chapter 9). Here we follow the young republic from 1830 to the eve of the Civil War, and meet the first generation of writers who set out to create a literature that was American and not merely English. Some of them were optimists who saw God in every leaf. Three of them — Poe, Hawthorne and Melville — looked into the same nature and the same human heart and found darkness: crime, guilt, obsession and the limits of what we can know.

5.1 History and Society: The Young Republic, 1830–1861

In 1830 the United States had 24 states and about 12.9 million inhabitants; by 1860 it had 33 states and 31.4 million (figures of the federal census). Most Americans still lived on farms, but canals, steamboats and, from the 1830s, railways tied the country together. The Erie Canal (1825) linked New York to the Great Lakes, and by 1860 the United States had about 30,000 miles (some 48,000 km) of railway track. Figura 5.1 sets the events and the books of this chapter on one time axis.

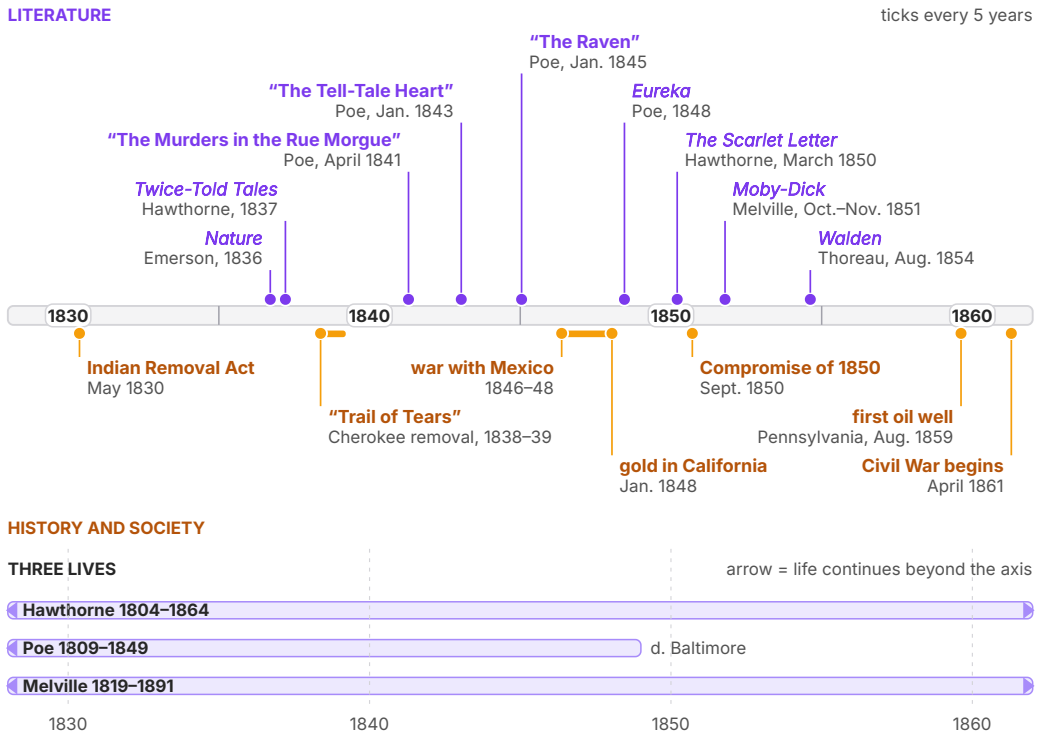


Figura 5.1 The United States, 1828–1862, on a proportional time axis (ticks every 5 years). Above the axis, literary works (violet; dates of first publication in book or magazine form); below it, history and society (amber; bars show events that lasted more than a year). At the bottom, the lives of the three writers of this chapter; an arrow means that the life continues beyond the axis.

5.1.1 Westward: the frontier and "Manifest Destiny"

For Americans of the period the *frontier* was the moving line between the settled East and the land beyond it. The Louisiana Purchase from France (1803) had already doubled the size of the country; in the 1840s expansion became a political programme. In 1845 the New York journalist John L. O'Sullivan wrote of the nation's "manifest destiny" to spread across the continent, and the phrase stuck. **Manifest Destiny** (*destino manifesto*) was the belief that the United States had a God-given right and duty to expand from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Texas was annexed in December 1845; the Oregon Treaty with Britain (1846) fixed the northern border in the West; the war with Mexico (1846–48) ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, by which Mexico gave up California and most of the present South-West.

Nine days before that treaty was signed, in January 1848, gold was found at Sutter's Mill in California. In 1849 tens of thousands of "forty-niners" arrived by land and by sea, and in September 1850 California became a state. Figura 5.2 shows the result: in late 1850 the thirty-one

states filled the East and the Pacific coast, while most of the land between them was still organised as federal territories or not organised at all.

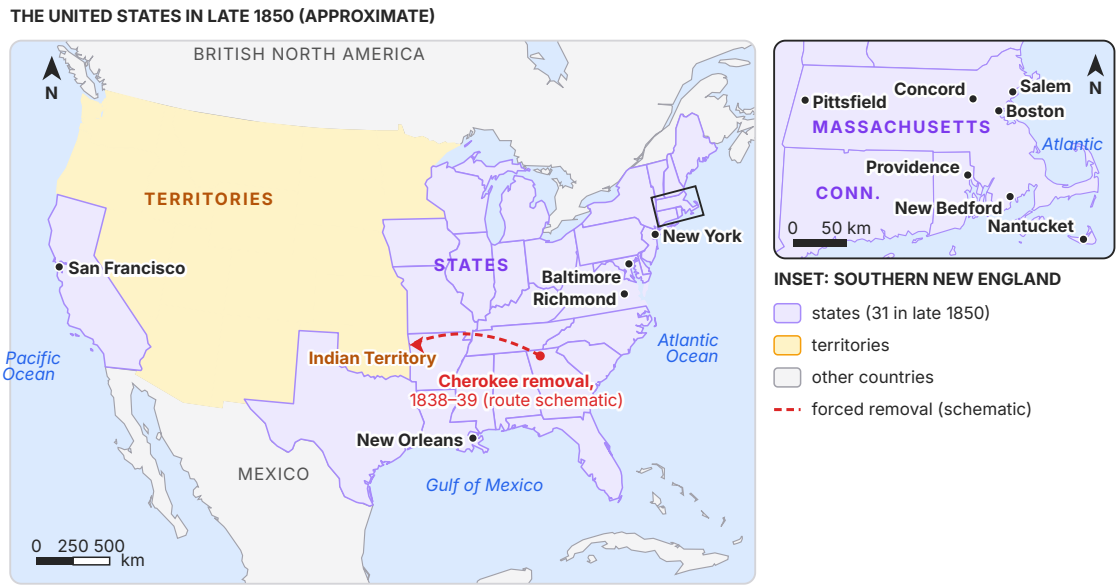


Figura 5.2 The United States in late 1850 (approximate): the 31 states (California was admitted on 9 September 1850; present-day West Virginia was then part of Virginia) and the federal territories, drawn on modern coastlines; internal borders of the territories are omitted. The dashed red line is a schematic of the Cherokee removal, not its real route. Inset: southern New England, with the places of this chapter. Coastlines and borders from Natural Earth (public domain).

5.1.2 The removal of Native nations

Expansion had a cost that the settlers' maps did not show. The Indian Removal Act, signed by President Andrew Jackson on 28 May 1830, allowed the federal government to exchange the lands of Native nations east of the Mississippi for land in the West. In theory the exchange was to be negotiated; in practice it was imposed. The Cherokee of Georgia, who had a written constitution and a newspaper printed partly in their own script, fought removal in the courts. In *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) the Supreme Court ruled that Georgia's laws had no force in Cherokee territory, but the decision was not enforced. In 1838 the US Army forced about 16,000 Cherokee from their homes into camps and then west to "Indian Territory", present-day Oklahoma. Thousands died of disease, cold and hunger on the way; common estimates are about 4,000. The journey is remembered as the "Trail of Tears". The Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw and Seminole nations were removed in the same years.

ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ «Nel 1850 gli Stati Uniti avevano già i loro cinquanta stati.» → ✓ Alla fine del 1850 gli stati erano **31**; gran parte dell'Ovest era fatta di **territori** federali, non ancora stati.

✗ «Il *Trail of Tears* fu una migrazione dei Cherokee verso terre migliori.» → ✓ Fu una **deportazione forzata** (1838–39), decisa dal governo e condotta dall'esercito; migliaia di persone morirono durante il viaggio.

5.1.3 New England and its Puritan past

You met the Pilgrims of the *Mayflower* (1620) and the Puritan colony of Massachusetts Bay (1630) in English 4, chapter 1. Two centuries later New England was the cultural centre of the nation: Harvard, the oldest college (1636), the publishers and magazines of Boston, and textile towns such as Lowell, where young women from farming families worked in the mills. But New Englanders also remembered a darker inheritance. In 1692, at Salem, a court condemned more than twenty people for witchcraft, and nineteen were hanged. One of the judges was John Hathorne — the great-great-grandfather of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was born in Salem and later added a "w" to the family name.

5.1.4 Ships, whales and oil

Before petroleum, much of the light in American and European homes came from whales. Whale oil burned in lamps and lubricated machines, and the waxy *spermaceti* from the head of the sperm whale made the best candles. By the 1840s the American whaling fleet was the largest in the world, and New Bedford, in Massachusetts, had overtaken the island of Nantucket as its capital. A voyage to the Pacific could last three or four years. In 1820 a sperm whale rammed and sank the Nantucket whaler *Essex* — the event that gave Melville the ending of his novel — and in January 1841 Melville himself sailed as a common seaman on the whaler *Acushnet*. The industry declined after 1859, when the first commercial oil well in the United States, in Pennsylvania, opened the age of kerosene.

5.1.5 Immigrants and a divided nation

The cities grew with immigrants. The Great Famine in Ireland (1845–52) and the failed revolutions of 1848 in Germany sent hundreds of thousands of people across the Atlantic, and in the 1850s a political movement hostile to Catholic immigrants, the "Know-Nothings", won seats in Congress. Meanwhile the cotton economy of the South depended on slavery: the census of 1860 counted almost four million enslaved people. Every new state raised the question of whether slavery would be allowed in it. The Compromise of 1850 admitted California as a free state but included a harsh Fugitive Slave Act; it postponed the conflict rather than solving it. That story, from abolitionism to the Civil War (1861–65), belongs to chapter 6.

5.2 Literature: An American Literature, Bright and Dark

5.2.1 "Our day of dependence": Emerson and Transcendentalism

Until the 1830s most Americans read British books, and American writers imitated British models. On 31 August 1837 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), a former minister, gave a lecture at Harvard called "The American Scholar". Its message is in two sentences: "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close" and "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe." A year earlier, in a short book called *Nature* (1836), Emerson had set out the ideas of a group of New England writers and reformers.

Transcendentalism (*trascendentalismo*) was a philosophical and literary movement of New England in the 1830s–1850s. Its members believed that every person can reach spiritual truth directly, through intuition and through nature, without churches or traditions; nature is a language in which the divine speaks. From this follows **self-reliance** (*fiducia in se stessi*), the title of an essay by Emerson (1841): trust your own mind rather than the opinions of society. The group published a magazine, *The Dial* (1840–44), edited at first by Margaret Fuller.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) put these ideas into practice. From July 1845 to September 1847 he lived in a cabin he had built by Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts. In *Walden* (1854) he explains why: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." In 1846 he spent a night in jail for refusing to pay a tax to a government that supported slavery and the war with Mexico; his essay on the subject, known as "Civil Disobedience" (1849), was later read by Gandhi and by Martin Luther King Jr.

5.2.2 The American Renaissance

The years around 1850 produced an extraordinary group of books: *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Walden* (1854) and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855, chapter 6). In 1941 the critic F. O. Matthiessen called this moment the **American Renaissance** (*Rinascimento americano*): it is a label invented by a twentieth-century scholar, not a name the writers used. It means the first great flowering of an American literature, roughly 1850–55; the "rebirth" is really a birth. Matthiessen studied five men — Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman — and left out Poe, women writers and African American writers; later critics have widened the canon (see the box below).

5.2.3 Dark Romanticism

Emerson's optimism had its critics. **Dark Romanticism** (*romanticismo nero*) is a modern critics' label for American writers of the period, above all Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, who shared the Romantic interest in imagination, nature and the individual but not its faith in human

goodness. Their subjects are sin and guilt, madness, crime and obsession; their nature is beautiful and indifferent; their heroes often destroy themselves trying to know too much. Their roots are partly in the Gothic novel (English 4, chapter 10) and partly in New England's Puritan theology. In 1850 Melville wrote that Hawthorne's "great power of blackness" came from "that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses", 1850).

APPROFONDIMENTO

Who belongs to the canon? A *canon* is the list of works that a culture treats as essential. Matthiessen's five writers dominated American classrooms for decades. Since the 1970s scholars have asked why the period's best-selling novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* (1845) were missing, and Emily Dickinson, who wrote her poems in exactly these years, is now read as one of the century's greatest poets (all three in chapter 6). Labels like "American Renaissance" are tools: useful to organise a period, dangerous if they decide in advance who counts.

5.2.4 Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

Poe was born in Boston on 19 January 1809, the son of two actors. Before he was three his father had disappeared and his mother had died, and he grew up in Richmond, Virginia, in the house of a merchant, John Allan, who never adopted him. He studied briefly at the University of Virginia, served in the army, and spent most of his life as a magazine editor and critic in Richmond, Philadelphia and New York, always short of money. In 1836 he married his young cousin Virginia Clemm, who died of tuberculosis in 1847. He died in Baltimore on 7 October 1849, after being found delirious in the street; the cause of his death is still unknown.

Poe wrote poems ("The Raven", January 1845, made him famous), criticism and some seventy tales. He did not invent the short story: Washington Irving and Hawthorne had written tales before him. What he did was to give it a theory. Reviewing Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* in 1842, he argued that a tale, unlike a novel, can be read "at one sitting", so the writer controls the reader from beginning to end. A skilful writer first conceives "a certain unique or single effect" and then invents the events that will produce it: "If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step." This principle is called the **unity of effect** (*unità d'effetto*): every element of a short text — every word, image and event — should work towards one single impression on the reader. In "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) Poe claimed that he had written "The Raven" in this way, "with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem"; many readers suspect he exaggerated.

Poe's tales fall into two main groups. The tales of terror — "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), "William Wilson" (1839), in which a man is haunted by his double, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) — explore fear, guilt and madness, often through a first-person narrator who does not understand himself. The tales that Poe called **tales of ratiocination** (*racconti di ragionamento*) turn the same intelligence towards a solution: in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) the Pari-

sian detective C. Auguste Dupin solves a crime by pure reasoning, more than forty years before Sherlock Holmes (English 2, unit 6).

5.2.5 Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864)

Hawthorne was born in Salem on 4 July 1804. After college he spent years writing alone in his mother's house; the tales of *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) made his name. In 1849 he lost his post at the Salem Custom House and wrote, in a few months, *The Scarlet Letter* (March 1850). The novel is set in Puritan Boston in the 1640s, two centuries before it was written. Hester Prynne, whose husband has not arrived from Europe, has a baby, Pearl; the magistrates condemn her to stand on the scaffold and to wear for ever a scarlet letter A, for adultery. She refuses to name the father — the young minister Arthur Dimmesdale, who hides his guilt and slowly destroys himself — while her husband, under the false name of Roger Chillingworth, takes his revenge by becoming the minister's doctor.

The letter is the novel's central symbol (English 4, chapter 11), and its meaning changes. For the magistrates it means shame; Hester embroiders it so beautifully that it becomes a work of art; years later, after her quiet work for the poor and the sick, many people say that the A means "Able" (ch. 13). Hawthorne called his books *romances*, not novels: in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) he explains that a romance may mix the real and the imaginary, while a novel must stay close to ordinary experience. From 1853 he was American consul in Liverpool, and in 1858–59 he lived in Rome and Florence, which gave him the setting of *The Marble Faun* (1860).

5.2.6 Herman Melville (1819–1891)

Melville was born in New York on 1 August 1819. His father's business failed and he went to sea at nineteen. In 1842, after eighteen months on the *Acushnet*, he deserted in the Marquesas Islands, in the South Pacific; his first book, *Typee* (1846), tells that adventure. In August 1850, on holiday in the hills of western Massachusetts, he met Hawthorne, who lived nearby at Lenox. Melville bought a farm near Pittsfield, finished his whale book there and dedicated it to Hawthorne.

The novel is narrated by Ishmael, a young schoolteacher who signs on the whaler *Pequod* at Nantucket. Only at sea does the crew learn the captain's purpose: Ahab, who lost a leg to a white sperm whale called Moby Dick, wants revenge. Ishmael calls his state of mind a **monomania** (*monomania*), an obsession with a single idea that controls an otherwise rational mind. After a voyage across three oceans the *Pequod* finds the whale and is destroyed; Ishmael alone survives, floating on a coffin. Between the adventure chapters Melville places essays on whales and whaling — the most famous is "Cetology" (ch. 32): **cetology** (*cetologia*) is the scientific study of whales — and chapters written like scenes of a play. The mixture puzzled readers in 1851; modern readers see in it an attempt to put the whole world, science included, into one book. Melville wrote much more, including the story "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853), whose clerk answers

every request with “I would prefer not to”, but he died almost forgotten; his reputation was revived only in the 1920s.

IN SINTESI

Three dark Romantics at a glance

- **Poe** (1809–1849) — tales and poems; unity of effect; tales of terror and of ratiocination; the unreliable first-person narrator. Key works: “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), “The Raven” (1845).
- **Hawthorne** (1804–1864) — romances of the Puritan past; sin, guilt, hypocrisy; the symbol. Key works: *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851).
- **Melville** (1819–1891) — the sea, obsession and the limits of knowledge; mixed forms. Key works: *Typee* (1846), *Moby-Dick* (1851), “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853).

ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ «Poe ha inventato il racconto breve.» → ✓ Poe non lo ha inventato, ma ne ha dato una **teoria** (l’unità d’effetto, 1842) e ha creato il racconto poliziesco moderno.

✗ «*La lettera scarlatta* racconta la Boston del 1850.» → ✓ Il romanzo è del 1850, ma è **ambientato** nella Boston puritana degli anni **1640**.

✗ «Moby-Dick è il nome del capitano.» → ✓ Il capitano è **Ahab**; Moby Dick è la **balena**. Nel titolo c’è il trattino (*Moby-Dick*), nel testo il nome della balena di solito no.

5.3 Texts: Three Dark Openings

Poe believed that a story is won or lost in its first sentence. The three extracts below are all openings, or almost: the first paragraphs of a tale, the moment a heroine first appears, and the first paragraph of a long novel. Each is told by a different kind of narrator. Read each one aloud before you read the notes.

5.3.1 T1 · Edgar Allan Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843)

Context. The tale first appeared in January 1843 in *The Pioneer*, a Boston magazine. Its nameless narrator lives with an old man. He speaks to someone — we never learn who — after the events he is about to describe, and he is determined to prove that he is not mad.

Tabella 5.1 T1 — "The Tell-Tale Heart", opening (text of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Raven Edition, vol. 2, 1903, Project Gutenberg eBook #2148)

True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Glosses. *dreadfully*: terribly · *acute*: very sharp, sensitive · *Hearken!* (archaic): listen! · *Object there was none*: I had no aim (inversion for emphasis) · *wronged*: treated unfairly · *vulture*: a large bird that eats dead animals · *a film*: a thin layer · *by degrees*: gradually · *rid myself of*: free myself from.

Analysis

A voice that betrays itself. The narrator wants to prove that he is calm and sane, but every feature of his language says the opposite. The dashes break his sentences into gasps ("nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous"); he repeats words and asks questions he cannot answer ("How, then, am I mad?"); he claims to hear things "in hell". He is a clear case of the unreliable narrator (English 4, chapter 7): we believe the facts he gives us, but not his judgement of them.

The motive. The second paragraph removes every normal motive — "Object there was none. Passion there was none" — and puts in its place a single obsession: the old man's "pale blue eye, with a film over it". The short, parallel sentences sound reasonable; what they say is insane. Notice the effect of the last sentence: the decision to kill is presented as the logical end of a calm process ("very gradually").

A single effect. In about 180 words Poe has given us the narrator, the victim, the obsession and the crime, and he has set the tone of dread that the rest of the tale will only intensify. This is the unity of effect at work: nothing in the opening is decoration.

1. What does the narrator want to prove to his listener? Quote the two questions that show it.
2. Find three dashes and say what they suggest about his state of mind.
3. The narrator says the disease "sharpened" his senses. Which sense, and why will it matter in a story called "The Tell-Tale Heart"?
4. List the motives he excludes. What is left?
5. Why do readers trust the facts but not the judgements of this narrator?

5.3.2 T2 · Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ch. 2, "The Market-Place" (1850)

Context. A crowd of Puritans waits outside the prison of Boston, and the women discuss what punishment Hester Prynne deserves. The town-beadle, the officer of the court, opens the door, and Hester steps out with her baby in her arms.

Tabella 5.2 T2 — *The Scarlet Letter*, ch. 2 (text of the illustrated edition, Boston: James R. Osgood, 1878, Project Gutenberg eBook #25344; American spelling as printed)

> When the young woman—the mother of this child—stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and, with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her towns-people and neighbors. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony.

Glosses. *clasp*: hold tightly · *bosom*: chest · *token*: a sign, a mark · *wrought* (old past participle of *work*): made, embroidered · *abashed*: made to feel ashamed · *gown*: a long dress · *flourishes*: decorative curves · *luxuriance of fancy*: rich imagination · *apparel*: clothes · *sumptuary regulations*: laws limiting luxury in clothes.

Analysis

Two impulses. Hester's first gesture is to hide the letter behind the baby; then she understands that the child is itself a "token of her shame", and she chooses to show both. Hawthorne describes the change from the outside, but his long, balanced sentences let us follow her reasoning: "wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another". Her face combines opposites — "a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile".

The letter described. We expect a mark of disgrace; we get a work of art. The noun phrase that introduces it is built to delay the subject: "On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared the letter A." The verb comes before its subject, and the letter A arrives only at the end of the sentence — exactly as it arrives before the eyes of the crowd. Hester has turned the punishment into "a last and fitting decoration", and in doing so she breaks the colony's laws against luxury a second time.

The narrator. Hawthorne's narrator is omniscient (English 4, chapter 8) and slightly ironic: he reports what the crowd sees, interprets Hester's motives, and speaks of "the taste of the age"

from two centuries later. Compared with T1, the distance between narrator and character is large: we watch Hester; we are not inside her head.

1. Why does Hester first hold the baby close? Why does she change her mind?
2. Find the contrast in her expression and explain it in your own words.
3. Rewrite the sentence that introduces the letter in normal word order (subject first). What is lost?
4. In what sense does the letter break the law a second time?
5. How is the narrator of T2 different from the narrator of T1?

5.3.3 T3 · Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ch. 1, "Loomings" (1851)

Context. The first paragraph of the novel. The narrator introduces himself and explains why, whenever he feels low, he goes to sea. A few pages later he will decide to sail on a whaler.

Tabella 5.3 T3 — *Moby-Dick*, ch. 1 (Project Gutenberg eBook #2701)

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.

Glosses. *Loomings*: things appearing indistinctly, usually threatening · *the spleen*: here, melancholy, bad temper · *grim about the mouth*: with a hard, sad expression · *drizzly*: with light rain · *coffin warehouses*: shops that sell coffins · *bringing up the rear*: walking at the back · *hypos*: depression (from *hypochondria*) · *pistol and ball*: suicide · *Cato*: Cato the Younger, the Roman who killed himself in 46 BC rather than live under Caesar.

Analysis

"Call me Ishmael." The narrator does not say "My name is Ishmael": he tells us what to call him, and the name may not be his own. In the Bible Ishmael, son of Abraham, is sent away into the desert — an outcast. Three words establish a voice that is friendly, direct and slightly mysterious.

Comedy and darkness. The paragraph is funny: the long sentence of four "whenever" clauses builds to a ridiculous climax, "methodically knocking people's hats off". But the images are of death — coffins, funerals, pistol and ball, Cato's sword. Ishmael treats his depression with irony, and the sea is his cure. In the last sentence he moves from himself to everybody: "almost

all men … cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean". The reader is invited on the voyage.

1. What does Ishmael do whenever he feels depressed? Give his two (ironic) medical reasons.
2. Find the four "whenever" clauses. How does the sentence create a comic climax?
3. Which words and images belong to the field of death?
4. Explain the comparison with Cato. Is it serious or comic, or both?
5. Both T1 and T3 are told in the first person and address the reader directly. Which narrator would you trust more, and why?

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

Comparing three first sentences. Task: *How does each writer use the first sentence to create an effect?*

1. **Step 1 — Copy the sentences.** T1: "True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?" T2 (the letter): "On the breast of her gown … appeared the letter A." T3: "Call me Ishmael."
2. **Step 2 — Describe the form.** T1: broken by dashes, an exclamation, a question to a listener. T2: long, with the subject delayed to the end. T3: three words, an imperative.
3. **Step 3 — Name the effect.** T1: anxiety and suspicion — we doubt the speaker at once. T2: suspense and surprise — the sign of shame appears as a jewel. T3: intimacy and mystery — a stranger speaks to us as a friend, under a borrowed name.
4. **Step 4 — Write the point.** "All three openings follow Poe's rule that the first sentence must serve the effect: Poe's dashes make us distrust his narrator, Hawthorne's delayed subject turns a punishment into a revelation, and Melville's three words make an outcast our guide."

5.4 Language: Complex Noun Phrases

Hawthorne does not write "Hester wore a red A". He writes "an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread". Much of the information in literary and scientific English is packed into noun phrases, not into verbs. You already know the basic order of adjectives (English 1, chapter 2), compound adjectives such as *well-known* (English 2, chapter 9) and the difference between pre- and post-modification in a formal noun phrase (English 4, chapter 5). This section puts them together, at C1 level: how to read a long noun phrase, how to build one, and when to break it up.

5.4.1 The anatomy of a noun phrase

As you saw in English 4, chapter 5, every noun phrase is built round a **head noun** (*nome testa*), the word that the rest of the phrase describes and that agrees with the verb. Before the head come the determiner and the pre-modifiers (adjectives, participles, other nouns); after it come the post-modifiers (prepositional phrases, participle clauses, relative clauses). Tabella 5.4 analyses phrases from this chapter.

Tabella 5.4 Noun phrases from this chapter, analysed

determiner	pre-modifiers	HEAD	post-modifiers
the	grim and grisly	**presence**	of the town-beadle (*Scarlet Letter*, ch. 2)
a	pale blue	**eye**	with a film over it (T1)
a	damp, drizzly	**November**	in my soul (T3)
the	whole dismal	**severity**	of the Puritanic code of law (*Scarlet Letter*, ch. 2)
the	most distant visible	**stars**	that our telescopes can detect
a	three-volume	**novel**	called *The Whale*, published in London in 1851

To find the head, ask what the phrase is about and test it with the verb: in “The severity of the laws **was** extreme” the head is *severity*, so the verb is singular, even though the nearest noun, *laws*, is plural.

5.4.2 Adjectives in order

When several adjectives come before a noun, they follow a strong tendency: opinion · size · age · shape · colour · origin · material · purpose, then the noun (Figura 5.3). The further right a word stands, the more it says what the thing *is* rather than what the speaker thinks of it: in *two new American whaling ships*, *whaling* tells us the kind of ship, and it is the last thing we could remove.

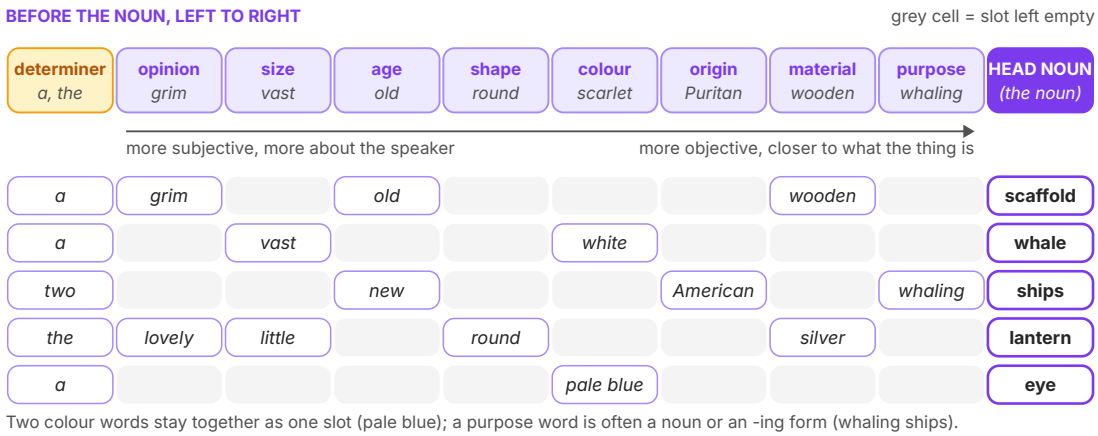


Figura 5.3 The order of pre-modifiers before a noun, with five noun phrases set in the slots. The order is a strong tendency of English, not an absolute rule; in practice a phrase rarely uses more than three of the slots.

Three further points matter at this level. First, **coordinate adjectives** (*aggettivi coordinati*) belong to the same category and could be joined by *and* or swapped; they take a comma: Melville's *a damp, drizzly November*. Adjectives from different categories are cumulative and take no comma: *a small old wooden boat*. Second, two colours can form one slot (*pale blue, black and white*). Third, a noun can work as a modifier — a **noun modifier** (*nome con funzione aggettivale*): *a whale ship, the town pump, a coffin warehouse*. It stands next to the head, after all the adjectives, and, as you know from English 4, chapter 5, it is normally singular: *a* ***coffin*** *warehouse*, not ✗ *a coffins warehouse*.

5.4.3 Compound adjectives at C1

A compound adjective joins two or more words with a hyphen and works as a single pre-modifier. At C1 you should be able to read and form all the common types (Tabella 5.5).

Tabella 5.5 Compound adjectives: the main types

pattern	examples	meaning
adverb + past participle	*a **well-known** tale, a **long-awaited** sequel*	a tale that is well known
noun + past participle	*a **gold-embroidered** letter, **sun-bleached** bones*	embroidered with gold; bleached by the sun
adjective / noun + present participle	*a **never-ending** voyage, a **heart-breaking** scene*	a voyage that never ends
adjective + noun + *-ed*	*a **blue-eyed** man, a **one-legged** captain*	a captain with one leg
number + singular noun	*a **three-volume** novel, a **four-year** voyage*	a novel in three volumes
noun + adjective	***sea-green** water, a **world-famous** whale*	green like the sea

Two spelling rules follow from the fact that the compound is one pre-modifier. The hyphen is used before the noun but normally not after a verb: *a **well-known** writer*, but *the writer is **well known***. And adverbs in *-ly* take no hyphen: *a **newly published** tale*.

5.4.4 Heavy noun phrases, and when to break them up

Scientific and academic English loves long noun phrases, because they let a writer name a complex idea and then say something about it: *The apparent brightness of a star at a distance r from the observer* **decreases** with the square of r. A **heavy noun phrase** (*sintagma nominale "pesante"*) is one so long that the reader has to wait for the verb or cannot see the head. Poe uses this effect on purpose: the narrator of T1 delays and piles up words because he is nervous. In your own writing, break a phrase up when:

- it has **more than three pre-modifiers**, especially nouns: ✗ *the dark night sky paradox explanation* → ✓ *an explanation of the paradox of the dark night sky*;
- the subject is **much longer than the predicate**: move the information after the verb, or use two sentences;
- two *of*-phrases **depend on each other** (*the meaning of the colour of the letter of Hester*): turn one into a possessive or a pre-modifier (*the meaning of the colour of Hester's letter*).

GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

Il sintagma nominale complesso. In italiano gli elementi che descrivono il nome vengono per lo più **dopo** di esso: *una lettera scarlatta ricamata d'oro*; in inglese molti vengono **prima**, e la testa (*nome testa*) arriva alla fine: *a **gold-embroidered scarlet letter***. Per tradurre dall'inglese, **cerca prima la testa** (l'ultimo nome prima di *of*, di un relativo o del verbo) e poi leggi i modificatori da destra a sinistra: *two new American whaling ships* = *due nuove baleniere americane*.

Confronto con l'italiano. L'italiano non ha aggettivi composti produttivi come *three-volume*: usa un complemento (*un romanzo in tre volumi*). Al contrario, l'inglese ammette catene di nomi (*a coffin warehouse* = *un magazzino di bare*) che in italiano richiedono sempre una preposizione.

ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ *a three-volumes novel* → ✓ *a three-**volume** novel* (nel composto il nome resta singolare).

✗ *a wooden old small boat* → ✓ *a small old wooden boat* (dimensione · età · materiale).

✗ *The writer is well-known* → ✓ *The writer is **well known***; ma ✓ *a well-known writer* (trattino solo davanti al nome).

✗ *The severity of the laws were extreme* → ✓ *The severity of the laws **was** extreme* (il verbo concorda con la testa, *severity*).

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

Unpacking and repacking. Task: *explain Hawthorne's phrase "the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law", then write a scientific sentence with a noun phrase of the same shape.*

1. **Find the head:** *severity* (test: *the severity … was*).
2. **Read the pre-modifiers:** *the whole dismal* — all of it, and gloomy.
3. **Read the post-modifier:** *of the Puritanic code of law* — whose severity? that of the Puritan legal code. Inside it, *code* is the head of a smaller noun phrase.
4. **Paraphrase:** *how gloomily strict the Puritan laws were, in every respect*.
5. **Repack in science:** *the total visible brightness of the most distant shell of stars* — determiner + two pre-modifiers + head (*brightness*) + an *of*-phrase with its own head (*shell*).

5.5 Skills: Fear on the Page and on the Screen

5.5.1 Vocabulary: fear, guilt and the sea

The words in Tabella 5.6 come from the three texts and the history of this chapter. *Dread* (English 4, chapter 10) and *voyage* (English 3, chapter 8) are recycled; notice their families.

Tabella 5.6 Fear, guilt and the sea: key words

word	meaning	example
dread (n., v.); *dreadful, dreadfully*	great fear of something that is going to happen	*"very, very dreadfully nervous" (T1)*
guilt (n.); *guilty* (adj.)	the feeling, or the fact, of having done wrong	*Dimmesdale hides his guilt for seven years.*
conscience (n.)	the inner sense of right and wrong; *a guilty conscience*	*His conscience will not let him rest.*
obsession (n.); *obsess* (v.), *obsessive* (adj.)	an idea that fills the mind and cannot be removed	*Ahab's obsession with the white whale.*
haunt (v.); *haunted, haunting* (adj.)	to keep returning to someone's mind; (of a ghost) to visit a place	*"it haunted me day and night" (T1)*
madness (n.)	the state of being mentally ill; very foolish behaviour	*The narrator denies his madness.*
whaler (n.)	a ship used for hunting whales; a person who hunts them	*Melville sailed on the whaler Acushnet.*
harpoon (n., v.)	a long spear with a rope, thrown to catch whales	*Queequeg is the best harpooner on board.*
voyage (n.)	a long journey, especially by sea	*A whaling voyage could last four years.*
wreck (n., v.); *shipwreck*	a ship destroyed at sea; to destroy	*The Essex was wrecked by a sperm whale.*

Collocations: verbs of seeing

English has a precise verb for each way of looking. You met *catch a glimpse of* in English 4, chapter 12; Tabella 5.7 completes the set. Each verb has its own preposition.

Tabella 5.7 Verbs of seeing

verb	how you look	typical pattern
glimpse / **catch a glimpse of**	see for a moment, not completely	*We caught a glimpse of the whale's tail.*
catch sight of	suddenly see, often for the first time	*She caught sight of the letter on her dress.*
glance (at)	look quickly, on purpose	*He glanced at the clock.*
stare (at)	look for a long time, often rudely or in surprise	*The crowd stared at Hester.*
gaze (at / into)	look for a long time, with wonder or in thought	*Ishmael gazed into the sea.*
peer (at / into / through)	look with difficulty, trying to see	*He peered into the dark room.*

5.5.2 Listening: Why Do We Like Being Scared?

Before you listen. What is the scariest story or film you know? Is it frightening because of what you see, or because of what you imagine? This term The Link, Year Five, the blog that Giulia shares with Sam, Aoife and Callum, has started recording a short conversation every month. **Listen (books closed)** while two classmates read the script aloud, then do the Towards INVALSI exercises.

Tabella 5.8 Listening script — Why Do We Like Being Scared?

Speaker	Line
Giulia	Hi, this is The Link, Year Five. I'm Giulia, in Turin, and Sam is in his room in halls. Sam, you promised a confession.
Sam	I did. Last Friday my corridor had a horror-film night. Eight of us, one laptop, all the lights off. And I watched most of the film through my fingers.
Giulia	An English student, scared of a film!
Sam	Hey, you read Poe this week. You tell me you weren't scared.
Giulia	Of "The Tell-Tale Heart"? Not scared, exactly. Uncomfortable. The narrator keeps telling you he's calm, and every sentence proves he isn't. By the end you feel you're his accomplice.
Sam	That's Poe's "single effect". Our lecturer said Poe planned every word to produce one feeling. No wasted sentences.

Giulia	Like a film where the music starts before anything happens. Prof.ssa Rossi told us that Alfred Hitchcock explained the difference between surprise and suspense with a bomb under a table. If it suddenly explodes, you get a few seconds of surprise. If the audience knows it's there and the characters don't, you get minutes of suspense.
Sam	So the fear is in the waiting. But why do we enjoy it? That's what I don't get.
Giulia	Well, there's the biology. When you're frightened, your body releases adrenaline, your heart beats faster and your breathing changes. In biology this week we called it the fight-or-flight response.
Sam	But on a sofa you can't fight or fly.
Giulia	Exactly — you're safe, and you know it. Many psychologists think that's the pleasure: real fear in a situation with no real danger. And afterwards you feel relieved, even proud.
Sam	My little sister Lily would agree. She's seven, and she makes Mum read the same ghost story every night. She hides under the duvet at the scary part and then shouts "Again!"
Giulia	That's the most honest review of a horror story I've ever heard. So, what do we recommend?
Sam	Poe for a short, sharp shock. Melville if you want a whole ocean of dread.
Giulia	And next month: *Heart of Darkness*. Bring a torch.

5.5.3 Speaking: a book talk

A **book talk** (*presentazione orale di un libro*) is a short spoken presentation that makes listeners want to read a book — at a reading group, in a library, at school. It is not a summary: you give just enough of the plot to create curiosity, and you never reveal the ending. A good three-minute book talk has four moves: a **hook** (a question, a quotation, a striking fact), the **situation** (who, where, what is at stake), **why it matters** (theme, style, what it did to you) and a **recommendation** (for whom).

Tabella 5.9 Useful language — a book talk

move	phrases
the hook	*Imagine… · What would you do if…? · The first sentence of this book is only three words long. · Here's a fact you may not know: …*
the situation	*It's set in… · The story follows… · At the start, … · Everything changes when…*
no spoilers	*I won't tell you how it ends, but… · Let's just say that… · You'll have to find out for yourself.*
why it matters	*What makes it special is… · It's really a book about… · The style is… · What stayed with me was…*
the recommendation	*If you liked…, you'll love… · It's perfect for anyone who… · Give it fifty pages and…*

1. **Task 1 (pairs).** Prepare a 90-second book talk on one of the texts of this chapter for a reader who has never heard of it. Your partner times you and notes your hook. Swap.
2. **Task 2 (groups of four).** Each student gives a three-minute book talk on a novel or a film they have enjoyed. The group votes for the talk that made them most curious and explains why, using the four moves.

5.5.4 Writing: a pitch and a screenplay scene

Many of Poe's tales have become films, and adapting a story is a good way to understand how it works. A filmmaker first sells the idea in a **pitch**: a title, a **logline** (*logline, sinossi in una frase*) — one sentence that gives the main character, the situation and what is at stake — and a short paragraph on genre, length, setting and approach. Then comes the **screenplay** (*sceneggiatura*), the written text of the film, in a fixed layout (Figura 5.4). Each scene starts with a **scene heading** (*intestazione di scena*): inside (INT.) or outside (EXT.), the place and the time of day. Action is written in the present tense and describes only what the camera can see and the microphone can hear; thoughts must become actions, objects or sounds. A narrator heard but not seen speaks in **voice-over** (*voce fuori campo*), marked V.O.

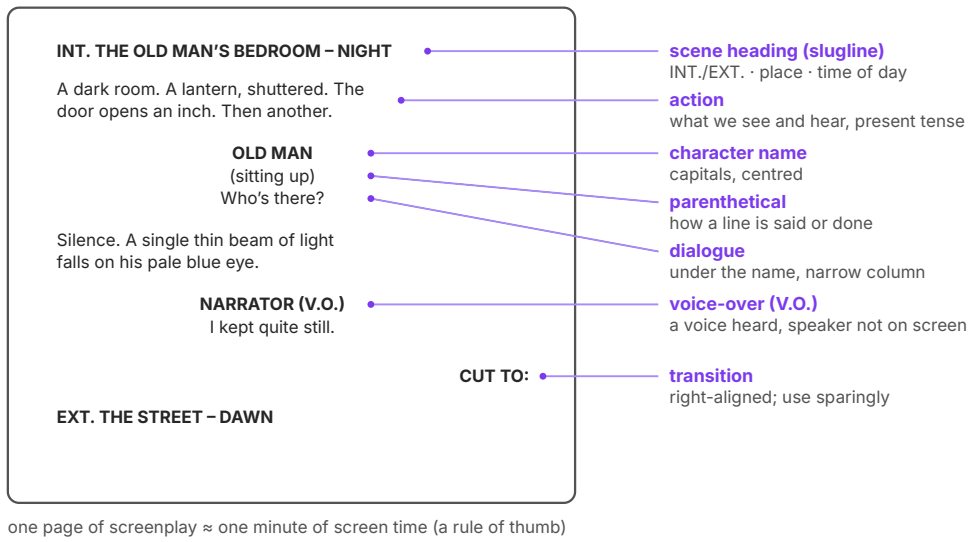


Figura 5.4 The layout of a screenplay page (the scene is an invented example based on T1). Professional scripts use a typewriter font and fixed margins; at school, what matters is that each element is recognisable.

Tabella 5.10 Model text — a pitch and a screenplay scene (226 words)

THE BEAT — a short film (8 minutes), adapted from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843)
Logline. A young night-shift worker who insists he is perfectly calm invites two police officers into his flat — and cannot stop hearing a sound that nobody else can hear.
Approach. A thriller set in one small flat in a modern city, in one night. We never leave Eli's point of view: the sound design does what Poe's dashes do. There is no blood on screen; the horror is in what we hear.
INT. ELI'S FLAT – KITCHEN – 4 A.M.
A small, spotless kitchen. Two POLICE OFFICERS sit at the table. ELI (20s), pale but smiling, pours tea with steady hands. A wall clock ticks.
OFFICER KAUR A neighbour heard a cry. Around midnight.
ELI (too quickly) That was me. A bad dream.
He laughs. The officers relax. Eli sits down. Under his chair, one floorboard is slightly raised.
The clock ticks. Then, under it, another sound: thump... thump. Faint. Regular.
ELI (V.O.) They could not hear it. Of course they could not.
The sound grows louder. Eli's smile freezes. The officers chat about the weather. Eli grips his cup.
OFFICER KAUR Everything all right, sir?
ELI (standing, shouting) Can't you hear it?
Silence. The officers look at each other. Eli stares at the floor.
CUT TO BLACK.

Analysis. The logline names the character (*a young night-shift worker*), the situation (*invites two police officers in*) and the stake (*a sound that nobody else can hear*). The approach paragraph explains the choices of the adaptation. In the scene, every feeling is shown: the steady hands, the laugh, the frozen smile. One line of voice-over keeps Poe's first-person narrator, and the contrast between the officers' calm and Eli's panic carries the single effect.

Checklist. ✓ title, length and source in the first line ✓ a logline of one sentence ✓ a short approach paragraph ✓ scene heading with INT./EXT., place and time ✓ action in the present tense, only what can be seen or heard ✓ character names in capitals ✓ dialogue short and natural ✓ one clear effect.

Task. Choose another tale by Poe (for example "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Masque of the Red Death" or "The Oval Portrait": all are in the public domain and online) and write a pitch and one scene in screenplay format (200–260 words). *Research tip:* read the tale in a reliable edition (Project Gutenberg, or the Poe Society of Baltimore's site) and note the edition you used.

LEARNING TO LEARN

INVALSI listening: use the pause. In March you will take the INVALSI English test (grado 13): it is computer-based, it tests reading and listening only, and it reports your level as *non ancora B1*, B1 or B2. Taking it is a requirement for admission to the final exam; the level you reach is not. Check the current year's decree and ordinance (MIM). In the listening section, the moments before each text are the most valuable you have.

- **Read the questions in the pause** and underline the key words: names, numbers, "why", "how many".
- **Predict the type of answer**: a place, a time, a reason, an opinion? For short answers, prepare to write at most the number of words allowed — words you hear, not a sentence of your own.
- **Don't stop on a missed item.** The text will not wait: leave the gap and catch the next answer. If you hear the text again, use the second time to fill the gaps and check.
- **Beware of distractors**: a word from an option often appears in the text with a different meaning ("Bring a torch" in the script is a joke, not advice).
- **Transfer.** The same steps work for listening in any language and for a *dettato* or *ascolto* in Italian; for Latin, reading the questions before a *versione* with comprehension tasks tells you what to look for.

5.6 Connections: Poe and the Scapigliatura; the Dark Night Sky

5.6.1 Poe in Italy: Tarchetti's fantastic tales

Poe reached most European readers through France. From 1848 the poet Charles Baudelaire translated his tales, and the collection *Histoires extraordinaires* (1856) made him a European author. In Milan in the 1860s a group of young writers and artists who rebelled against bourgeois respectability and against the late-Romantic tradition of Manzoni's followers took the name of **Scapigliatura** (*Scapigliatura*, from a novel by Cletto Arrighi, 1862). They loved the macabre, the irrational and the morbid, and Poe was one of their models.

The most Poe-like of them was Iginio Ugo Tarchetti (1839–1869), who died of tuberculosis in Milan at twenty-nine. His *Racconti fantastici* were published in 1869, the year of his death. They are examples of the **fantastic tale** (*racconto fantastico*): a story in which an apparently superna-

tural event breaks into ordinary, realistic life, and neither the narrator nor the reader can decide whether it has a natural explanation. “Un osso di morto” begins:

> *Lascio a chi mi legge l’apprezzamento del fatto inesplicabile che sto per raccontare.*
> — Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, “Un osso di morto”, *Racconti fantastici* (1869) (as transcribed on Wikisource from the 1869 edition)

“I leave it to my reader to judge the inexplicable event that I am about to tell” (translation by the editors). Like Poe’s narrator in T1, Tarchetti’s speaks in the first person and turns to the reader at once. But the two openings point in opposite directions. Poe’s narrator insists that he is sane and asks us to accept his logic; we judge him instead. Tarchetti’s narrator — an art student in Pavia, in a story set in 1855 — admits that he cannot explain what happened and leaves the judgement to us. Poe’s horror comes from inside a mind; Tarchetti’s comes from outside, from an event that reason cannot account for.

COLLEGAMENTI

History: American writers in Risorgimento Italy. Margaret Fuller, the first editor of *The Dial*, reported on the revolutions of 1848–49 for the *New-York Tribune*; in Rome during the Roman Republic of 1849 she organised a hospital while the city was besieged by the French. She drowned with her family in a shipwreck off New York in July 1850, on her way home. Hawthorne, who lived in Rome and Florence in 1858–59, set his last completed romance, *The Marble Faun* (1860), among the artists and ruins of Rome; Melville visited Italy in 1857. For a colloquio, this is a bridge from American literature to the Risorgimento you study in history.

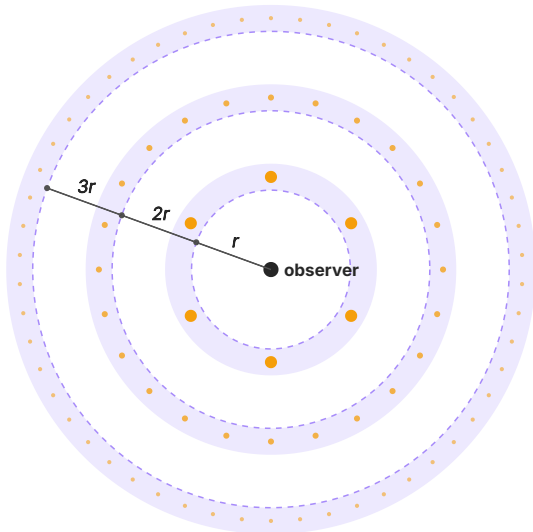
5.6.2 Screen, music and art

Poe and Melville have inspired filmmakers, composers and artists for more than a century. John Huston’s film *Moby Dick* (1956), with a screenplay by Huston and the science-fiction writer Ray Bradbury, cast Gregory Peck as Ahab. In 1930 the American artist Rockwell Kent illustrated an edition of the novel with black-and-white drawings of the sea and the whale — dark, simplified, almost geometric shapes against vast empty spaces — which are still among the best-known images of the book. In music, Sergei Rachmaninoff’s choral symphony *The Bells* (1913) sets a Russian version of Poe’s poem by Konstantin Balmont, and Claude Debussy worked for years on an opera based on “The Fall of the House of Usher”, which he left unfinished when he died in 1918. In the early 1960s the American director Roger Corman made a series of low-budget Poe films, beginning with *House of Usher* (1960).

5.6.3 Poe’s *Eureka* and the dark night sky

Why is the sky dark at night? The question sounds childish, but it puzzled astronomers for centuries. Imagine an infinite universe, the same everywhere, with stars spread evenly through it.

Divide the space round the Earth into thin spherical shells of equal thickness (Figura 5.5). A shell at distance 2r has four times the area, and so about four times as many stars, as a shell at distance r; but each of those stars looks four times fainter, because the light we receive from a star decreases with the square of its distance — the **inverse-square law** (*legge dell'inverso del quadrato*). The two effects cancel: every shell sends us the same amount of light. With infinitely many shells, every line of sight would end on the surface of a star, and the night sky should blaze like the Sun. It does not. This contradiction is known as **Olbers' paradox** (*paradosso di Olbers*), after the German astronomer Heinrich Olbers, who discussed it in 1823, although Kepler had raised the problem in 1610.



three shells of equal thickness (not to scale)

shell at	stars in the shell	light of one star	light of the shell
distance	$\propto r^2$	$\propto 1/r^2$	product
r	N	1	**N**
2r	4N	1/4	**N**
3r	9N	1/9	**N**
10r	100N	1/100	**N**

Every shell sends the observer the same amount of light. With endless shells of stars, the total is unlimited: in every direction the line of sight would end on the surface of a star, and the whole night sky would shine like the surface of the Sun.

Why the sky is dark: the universe has a finite age (about 13.8 billion years), so light from very distant stars has not reached us; stars do not shine for ever; expansion weakens distant light.

Figura 5.5 Olbers' paradox (simplified). Shells of equal thickness at distances r, 2r, 3r... contain a number of stars that grows as r^2, while the light that reaches the observer from each star falls as $1/r^2$: each shell contributes the same total. The star symbols are schematic; numbers in the table are exact consequences of the two proportionalities. The age of the universe (about 13.8 billion years) is the value measured by the Planck satellite.

In 1848 Poe published *Eureka*, which he subtitled "A Prose Poem": a long essay on the origin and structure of the universe. In one passage he states the paradox in his own words: "Were the succession of stars endless, then the background of the sky would present us an uniform luminosity, like that displayed by the Galaxy". He then suggests a way out — that the distance of the background might be "so immense that no ray from it has yet been able to reach us at all" — although he adds that we have no reason to believe it. Modern cosmology gives an answer close to Poe's possibility. The universe is not infinitely old: it is about 13.8 billion years old, so we receive light only from a limited region of space; stars do not shine for ever; and the expansion of

the universe stretches the light of distant galaxies to longer, weaker wavelengths. Poe was not a scientist, and much of *Eureka* is wrong; but on this point a poet's intuition came surprisingly near the truth.

COLLEGAMENTI

Physics: the inverse-square law. A source of power L radiates equally in all directions, so at a distance d its light is spread over a sphere of area $4\pi d^2$. The intensity received is

$$I = \frac{L}{4\pi d^2}$$

Double the distance and the intensity becomes one quarter; multiply it by ten and it becomes one hundredth. The same law governs sound, gravity (Newton) and the electric force (Coulomb). In Olbers' argument it is balanced by geometry: the number of stars in a thin shell of radius r grows as its area, $4\pi r^2$.

DA RICORDARE

For the exam. *Starting point:* an image described in words — a clear night sky far from any city, full of stars, with black spaces between them. Three links it opens:

- **English literature** — Poe's *Eureka* (1848) and the limits of knowledge in Dark Romanticism; darkness as a symbol in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (chapter 7).
- **Italian literature** — Leopardi, "Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia", in which a shepherd questions the moon and the stars about the meaning of life.
- **Physics** — Olbers' paradox, the inverse-square law, the finite age and the expansion of the universe.

SINTESI

- Between 1830 and 1860 the United States grew from 24 to 33 states and from 12.9 to 31.4 million people, driven by the belief in **Manifest Destiny** (1845): Texas, Oregon, the war with Mexico, the Gold Rush.
- The **Indian Removal Act** (1830) led to the forced removal of Native nations; the Cherokee "Trail of Tears" (1838–39) cost thousands of lives.
- New England, with its **Puritan memory** (Salem, 1692), was the cultural centre; whaling (New Bedford, Nantucket) was a major industry until petroleum (1859); slavery divided the nation.
- **Emerson** ("The American Scholar", 1837) called for an independent American literature; **Transcendentalism** (Emerson, Thoreau's *Walden*, 1854) trusted intuition, nature and self-reliance.
- The **American Renaissance** (Matthiessen's label, 1941) names the great books of c. 1850–55; **Dark Romanticism** names writers who explored sin, guilt, madness and obsession.
- **Poe** theorised the short story through the **unity of effect** (1842) and wrote tales of terror and of ratiocination; "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) has an unreliable narrator.
- **Hawthorne**'s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), set in 1640s Boston, makes the letter A a symbol whose meaning changes.
- **Melville**'s *Moby-Dick* (1851), narrated by Ishmael, mixes adventure, Ahab's monomania and encyclopedic chapters such as "Cetology".
- Language: a noun phrase has a **head**; pre-modifiers follow the order opinion · size · age · shape · colour · origin · material · purpose; compound adjectives take a hyphen before the noun; break up heavy noun phrases.
- Skills: verbs of seeing (*glance, stare, gaze, peer, catch sight of*); the book talk; the pitch, the logline and the screenplay scene; using the pause in INVALSI listening.
- Connections: Poe reached Italy through Baudelaire and influenced the **Scapigliatura** and Tarchetti's *Racconti fantastici* (1869); in *Eureka* (1848) Poe glimpsed the modern answer to **Olbers' paradox**.

ESERCIZI

History and Literature

1. ● The Indian Removal Act (1830)…
   - **A.** gave all Native Americans the right to vote
   - **B.** allowed the federal government to exchange Native lands in the East for land in the West
   - **C.** created the state of Oklahoma
   - **D.** ended the war between the United States and Mexico

2. ● Who gave the name “American Renaissance” to the great books of c. 1850–55?
   - **A.** Ralph Waldo Emerson
   - **B.** Edgar Allan Poe
   - **C.** F. O. Matthiessen
   - **D.** Herman Melville

3. ● Which of these works is NOT by Poe?
   - **A.** “The Raven”
   - **B.** *Eureka*
   - **C.** “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”
   - **D.** “Bartleby, the Scrivener”

4. ● True or false? Correct the false statements. a In 1860 the United States had 31 states. b The Supreme Court decision of 1832 was favourable to the Cherokee. c Thoreau lived at Walden Pond for the rest of his life. d *The Scarlet Letter* is set in the Boston of the 1640s. e *Moby-Dick* was a best-seller when it appeared. f Poe invented the short story.

5. ●● Match each work with its author and its date. Works: *Nature* · *Twice-Told Tales* · “The Tell-Tale Heart” · *Eureka* · *The Scarlet Letter* · *Moby-Dick* · *Walden*. Authors: Emerson · Hawthorne · Melville · Poe · Thoreau (two authors are used twice). Dates: 1836 · 1837 · 1843 · 1848 · 1850 · 1851 · 1854.

6. ●● Explain each term in one or two sentences and give an example from this chapter: a Manifest Destiny · b Transcendentalism · c Dark Romanticism · d unity of effect · e monomania.

7. ●●● Short answer (100–130 words: a definition, an example, a link). *What is Dark Romanticism, and how is it different from Emerson’s Transcendentalism?*

Text Analysis

8. ● In T2, what is Hester’s first impulse when she comes out of the prison?
   - **A.** to hold the baby close, so as to hide the letter
   - **B.** to show the letter proudly to the crowd
   - **C.** to ask the magistrates for mercy
   - **D.** to give the baby to the town-beadle

9. ● T1. Answer briefly. a Whom is the narrator speaking to? b Which of his senses is the most acute? c Why does he decide to kill the old man? d How does he describe the old man’s eye?

10. ●● T1. Find in the text: a two questions the narrator asks his listener; b an inversion used for emphasis; c three places where dashes break a sentence; d a sentence that is calm in form but insane in content. Say what each feature suggests about the narrator.

11. ●● T2. Paraphrase in simple modern English: a “one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another” · b “a glance that would not be abashed” · c “greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony”.

12. ●●● T2. Write a PEE paragraph (100–120 words): *How does Hawthorne turn a sign of shame into something else in this passage?*

13. ●● T3. a Why does Ishmael go to sea, and how often? b Find two examples of humour and explain them. c What does the comparison with Cato add to the paragraph?

14. ●●● T1 and the Italian text. Compare the opening of "The Tell-Tale Heart" with the first sentence of Tarchetti's "Un osso di morto", quoted in the Connections section (about 100 words): who speaks, to whom, and what does each narrator ask the reader to do?

Language

15. ● Put the words in the correct order. a (wooden / old / a / small) boat · b (blue / a / pale) eye · c (whaling / American / new / two) ships · d (silk / beautiful / red / a) dress · e (round / brass / heavy / a) lantern · f (Puritan / grim / old / a) magistrate

16. ● Rewrite each phrase with a compound adjective before the noun. a a novel in three volumes · b a voyage that lasted four years · c a captain with one leg · d a letter embroidered with gold · e a writer who is well known · f a story that breaks your heart

17. ●● Hyphen or no hyphen? Write the words in brackets correctly. a Poe is a (well known) writer. b Today Poe is (well known) all over the world. c It was a (newly discovered) manuscript. d They sailed on a (three year) voyage. e The voyage was (three years) long.

18. ●● Error correction. Find and correct the mistake in each phrase or sentence. a ✗ a five-chapters story b ✗ a wooden big chest c ✗ The captain was well-known for his temper. d ✗ two whalings ships e ✗ The meaning of the symbols are clear. f ✗ an American old novel

19. ●● Find the head of each subject and choose the correct verb. a The colour of the letters (is / are) red. b The novels of the American Renaissance (was / were) written in a few years. c The number of whalers in New Bedford (was / were) growing. d The opening paragraphs of Poe's tale (create / creates) suspense. e The light from the most distant stars (has / have) not reached us.

20. ●●● Rewrite each sentence so that the noun phrase is easier to read: move information after the head, or use two sentences. a The dark night sky paradox explanation was suggested by Poe. b The 1851 London three-volume first edition title was *The Whale*. c The Salem 1692 witchcraft trial judges included Hawthorne's ancestor. d The whale oil lamp light quality was better than candle light.

21. ●●● Translate into English, using a compound adjective or a noun modifier where possible. a Melville scrisse un romanzo in tre volumi su una caccia alla balena. b La lettera scarlatta, ricamata d'oro, attirava lo sguardo di tutti. c Il narratore del racconto di Poe è un uomo dagli occhi stanchi che non dorme da giorni.

Vocabulary

22. ● Complete with words from Tabella 5.6, changing the form if necessary. a Dimmesdale feels ___ but cannot confess. b The idea of the eye ___ the narrator day and night. c Ahab's ___ with the whale destroys the ship. d The ___ of the *Essex* gave Melville his ending. e Queequeg throws his ___ at the whale. f She woke up with a feeling of ___ on the morning of the exam.

23. ●● Choose the correct verb. a She (glanced / gazed) at her watch and ran out. b The children (stared / glimpsed) at the strange visitor for a whole minute. c From the deck we finally (caught sight of / peered) land. d He (peered / glanced) into the fog, trying to see the rocks. e For hours Ishmael (gazed / glanced) at the sea, lost in thought. f Through the trees we only (caught a glimpse of / stared at) the house.

24. ●● Word families. Complete with the missing verb or adjective, then use one adjective from each pair in a sentence of your own. a obsession → verb ___, adjective ___ · b haunt → two adjectives ___, ___ · c dread → adjective ___, adverb ___ · d guilt → adjective ___, adverb ___ · e madness → adjective ___, verb ___ ("to make someone very angry")

Writing and Speaking

25. ●●● Writing. Choose a tale by Poe that is not printed in this chapter and write a pitch and one scene in screenplay format (200–260 words): title, length and source; a one-sentence logline; a short approach paragraph; one scene with a scene heading, action in the present tense, character names in capitals and short dialogue. Use the checklist in the Skills section.

26. ●● Speaking. Give a three-minute book talk on *Moby-Dick* to a reading group of students who have never read it. Use the four moves (hook, situation, why it matters, recommendation) and do not reveal the ending.

Towards INVALSI

27. ● (B1) Listening. Where did Sam watch the horror film?
    - **A.** at the cinema with friends from his course
    - **B.** at home in Bristol with his sister Lily
    - **C.** alone in his room in halls
    - **D.** with seven other students on his corridor in halls

28. ●● (B2) Listening. Answer in no more than four words. a How did Sam watch most of the film? b According to Sam's lecturer, what did Poe plan every word to produce? c In Hitchcock's example, what is under the table? d What does the body release when we are frightened? e What will The Link read next month?

29. ●● (B2) Listening. True (T), false (F) or not given (NG)? a The students watched the film on a laptop. b Giulia was frightened by "The Tell-Tale Heart". c Prof.ssa Rossi showed the class a Hitchcock film. d Giulia has studied the fight-or-flight response at school. e Lily refuses to listen to ghost stories. f Sam has already read *Heart of Darkness*.

30. ● (B1) Listening. Who says it: Giulia (G) or Sam (S)? a admits being scared by a film · b mentions a teacher in Turin · c reports what a university lecturer said · d talks about a member of the family · e gives a biological explanation · f announces the next book

Towards the Exam

31. ●●● Colloquio. Starting point — a short quotation from Poe's *Eureka* (1848): the background of the sky might be "so immense that no ray from it has yet been able to reach us at all". Talk for 3 minutes: explain the quotation, place it in its period and link it to two other subjects.

PER APPROFONDIRE

- [NAA] *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*: the volume on 1820–1865, with Emerson's "The American Scholar", Poe's tales and "The Philosophy of Composition", and the complete *Scarlet Letter*.
- [GRA] R. Gray, *A History of American Literature*: the chapters on the American Renaissance, on Poe and on Hawthorne and Melville.
- [ABR] M. H. Abrams, G. G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*: the entries "short story", "Transcendentalism" and "romance".
- [SWA] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: the entries on the order of adjectives and on compound adjectives.
- [HEW] M. Hewings, *Advanced Grammar in Use*: the units on noun phrases and on compound adjectives.

Glossario del capitolo

American Renaissance
Rinascimento americano — the great flowering of American literature c. 1850–55; a label coined by F. O. Matthiessen (1941).

Book talk
presentazione orale di un libro — a short spoken presentation that makes listeners want to read a book, without revealing the ending.

Cetology
cetologia — the scientific study of whales; the title of chapter 32 of *Moby-Dick*.

Coordinate adjectives
aggettivi coordinati — adjectives of the same category that could be joined by *and*; they are separated by commas (*a damp, drizzly November*).

Dark Romanticism
romanticismo nero — a modern label for American writers (Poe, Hawthorne, Melville) who explored sin, guilt, madness and obsession.

Fantastic tale
racconto fantastico — a story in which an apparently supernatural event enters ordinary life and cannot be clearly explained.

Head noun
nome testa — the main noun of a noun phrase, which the other words describe and the verb agrees with.

Heavy noun phrase
sintagma nominale "pesante" — a noun phrase so long that it hides its head or delays the verb.

Inverse-square law
legge dell'inverso del quadrato — the law by which the intensity of light (or sound, gravity…) decreases with the square of the distance.

Logline
logline, sinossi in una frase — a one-sentence summary of a film: the main character, the situation and what is at stake.

Manifest Destiny
destino manifesto — the 19th-century belief that the United States had a God-given right to expand across North America.

Monomania
monomania — an obsession with a single idea in an otherwise rational mind (Ahab's, in *Moby-Dick*).

Noun modifier
nome con funzione aggettivale — a noun used before another noun to describe it (*a whale ship*); it is normally singular.

Olbers' paradox
paradosso di Olbers — the contradiction between an infinite, unchanging universe full of stars and the darkness of the night sky.

Scapigliatura
Scapigliatura — a rebellious movement of writers and artists in Milan in the 1860s–70s, drawn to the macabre and the irrational.

Screenplay
sceneggiatura — the written text of a film, with scene headings, action and dialogue in a fixed layout.

Tale of ratiocination
racconto di ragionamento — Poe's name for his detective stories, in which a crime is solved by pure reasoning.

Transcendentalism
trascendentalismo — a New England movement (1830s–1850s) that sought spiritual truth through intuition and nature (Emerson, Thoreau).

Unity of effect
unità d'effetto — Poe's principle that every element of a short text should produce one single impression on the reader.

Voice-over
voce fuori campo — in a film, the voice of a narrator or character who is heard but not seen (V.O.).

Soluzioni

1. B (it authorised "exchanges" of land; in practice removal was imposed).

2. C (F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 1941).

3. D ("Bartleby, the Scrivener", 1853, is by Melville).

4. a F — 33 in 1860 (31 was the number at the end of 1850). b T (*Worcester v. Georgia*; the decision was not enforced). c F — he lived there from July 1845 to September 1847. d T. e F — reviewers were puzzled and sales were poor; its fame came in the 1920s. f F — he did not invent it but gave it a theory (the unity of effect).

5. *Nature* — Emerson, 1836 · *Twice-Told Tales* — Hawthorne, 1837 · "The Tell-Tale Heart" — Poe, 1843 · *Eureka* — Poe, 1848 · *The Scarlet Letter* — Hawthorne, 1850 · *Moby-Dick* — Melville, 1851 · *Walden* — Thoreau, 1854.

6. Model answers. a The belief, named in 1845, that the United States had a God-given right to expand across the continent; e.g. the annexation of Texas and the war with Mexico. b A New England movement of the 1830s–50s that trusted intuition and nature as ways to spiritual truth; e.g. Emerson's *Nature*, Thoreau at Walden. c A modern label for writers who shared Romantic themes but explored sin, guilt and madness; e.g. Poe, Hawthorne, Melville. d Poe's principle that every element of a short text should produce one single impression; e.g. the opening of "The Tell-Tale Heart". e An obsession with one idea in an otherwise rational mind; e.g. Ahab and the white whale.

7. *Traccia.* Definition: Dark Romanticism is a modern critics' label for American writers of c. 1835–1855 (Poe, Hawthorne, Melville) who share the Romantic interest in imagination and nature but explore sin, guilt, madness and the limits of knowledge. Contrast: Transcendentalism (Emerson, Thoreau) believes that every person can reach truth through intuition and that nature reveals the divine; the Dark Romantics see nature as indifferent (the white whale) and the human heart as capable of evil (the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart", Dimmesdale's hidden guilt). Link: the Puritan sense of original sin (Melville on Hawthorne's "power of blackness") or the European Gothic novel.

8. A (then she realises that the child is itself a sign of her shame and shows both).

9. a An unnamed listener ("you") who thinks he is mad. b Hearing. c He has no reason except the old man's eye, which he cannot bear. d The eye of a vulture: pale blue, with a film over it.

10. a "but why will you say that I am mad?", "How, then, am I mad?" — he is on the defensive. b "Object there was none. Passion there was none." (also "For his gold I had no desire") — he sounds logical, almost legal. c e.g. "nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous", "not destroyed—not dulled", "how healthily—how calmly" — he speaks in gasps; his calm is a performance. d e.g. "I loved the old man" followed by the decision to kill him, or the last sentence ("very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man") — the contrast reveals his madness.

11. a She realised that hiding one sign of her shame (the letter) behind another (the baby) would not work. b a look that refused to show shame. c much more luxurious than the colony's laws on clothes allowed.

12. *Model paragraph.* Point: Hawthorne turns the scarlet letter from a mark of disgrace into a display of art and defiance. Evidence: the sentence that introduces it delays the subject — "On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared the letter A" — so the letter appears last, as a revelation; the narrator calls it "a last and fitting decoration" of "gorgeous luxuriance". Explanation: the punishment designed by the

magistrates becomes Hester's own creation, and by its luxury it even breaks the colony's laws again. Shame is turned into pride, as her "haughty smile" shows.

13. a Whenever he feels depressed, "grim about the mouth"; he says it is his way of "driving off the spleen" (melancholy). b e.g. the climax of "methodically knocking people's hats off"; the pseudo-medical "regulating the circulation"; going to sea as a "substitute for pistol and ball". c Cato killed himself with a philosophical gesture; Ishmael "quietly" goes to sea instead: the comparison is comic, but it admits that his melancholy is serious.

14. *Traccia.* Both narrators speak in the first person and address the reader at once. Poe's narrator speaks to a listener who thinks he is mad and asks him to accept his logic ("observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story"); we end up judging him. Tarchetti's narrator presents "il fatto inesplicabile" and openly leaves the judgement to the reader ("Lascio a chi mi legge l'apprezzamento"). Poe's horror comes from inside a mind; Tarchetti's comes from an event reason cannot explain.

15. a a small old wooden boat · b a pale blue eye · c two new American whaling ships · d a beautiful red silk dress · e a heavy round brass lantern · f a grim old Puritan magistrate.

16. a a three-volume novel · b a four-year voyage · c a one-legged captain · d a gold-embroidered letter · e a well-known writer · f a heart-breaking story.

17. a well-known · b well known · c newly discovered (no hyphen after an *-ly* adverb) · d three-year · e three years.

18. a a five-chapter story · b a big wooden chest · c was well known · d two whaling ships · e The meaning of the symbols is clear · f an old American novel.

19. a colour → is · b novels → were · c number → was · d paragraphs → create · e light → has.

20. Model answers. a Poe suggested an explanation of the paradox of the dark night sky. b In London, in 1851, the first edition appeared in three volumes. Its title was *The Whale*. c One of the judges at the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 was Hawthorne's ancestor. d The light of a whale-oil lamp was better than the light of a candle.

21. a Melville wrote a three-volume novel about a whale hunt. b The gold-embroidered scarlet letter caught everyone's eye. c The narrator of Poe's tale is a tired-eyed man who has not slept for days. (Accept *a man with tired eyes* in c.)

22. a guilty (also *guilt*) · b haunted · c obsession · d wreck · e harpoon · f dread.

23. a glanced · b stared · c caught sight of · d peered · e gazed · f caught a glimpse of.

24. a obsess; obsessive (or obsessed) · b haunted, haunting (*a haunted house* has ghosts; *a haunting melody* stays in your mind) · c dreadful; dreadfully · d guilty; guiltily · e mad; madden. Sentences: open.

25. Guidance: check the result against the checklist (title, length and source; a one-sentence logline naming character, situation and stake; an approach paragraph; a scene heading with INT./EXT., place and time; present-tense action limited to what can be seen and heard; names in capitals; short dialogue; one clear effect). Assessment: task (4), organisation and layout (4), language (4), effect on the reader (3).

26. *Model.* "Have you ever wanted something so much that you would sacrifice everything for it? *Moby-Dick* begins with three words — 'Call me Ishmael' — and a young man who goes to sea whenever life on land gets too grey. He signs on the *Pequod*, a whaler from Nantucket, and only at sea does he meet the captain, Ahab, who has lost a leg to a white whale and wants one thing only. I won't tell you how the hunt ends. What makes the book special is that it is everything at once: an adventure, a tragedy about obsession, a comic travel book and an encyclopedia of whales... If you liked *Jaws* or any story about an impossible quest, give it fifty pages and you will not stop."

27. D (eight of them, on his corridor, with one laptop).

28. a through his fingers · b one feeling (a single effect) · c a bomb · d adrenaline · e *Heart of Darkness*.

29. a T · b F — she was "uncomfortable", not scared · c NG — Prof.ssa Rossi only told them about Hitchcock's example · d T ("In biology this week…") · e F — she asks for the same ghost story every night · f NG.

30. a S · b G · c S · d S · e G · f G.

31. *Traccia.* Explain: in *Eureka* (1848) Poe asks why the night sky is dark if the stars are endless, and suggests that light from the most distant background may not yet have reached us. Period: Poe and Dark Romanticism, the limits of knowledge; Poe's interest in science and the "single effect". Links: physics — Olbers' paradox, the inverse-square law, the finite age of the universe (about 13.8 billion years) and its expansion; Italian literature — Leopardi's "Canto notturno" (the shepherd questioning the stars) or the night sky in Pascoli; philosophy — the infinite universe of Giordano Bruno. Close with the meaning of the image for you.