

Poe's use of atmosphere in the "oblong box" essay sample

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Edgar Allan Poe uses three elements, which make the mystifying atmosphere in the " Oblong Box". He uses nature, mystery, and a deep romantic love.

First, one element is nature. Nature builds itself up throughout the story. At the beginning, they had to put off the trip for a week because of the weather. On the day before the ship was originally scheduled to set sail Mr. Wyatt's wife died. Poe points that the first three or four days had fine weather. This was the calm before the storm. As the weather grew worse, Wyatt's conduct became gloomier. Poe even says he was morose. After seven days the weather worsened. The passengers expected this because the weather had been building up. Then it became a hurricane. The story is reaching a climatic point. Also, Poe states that the moon heightened the spirits of the passengers in the crisis. Then, when Mr. Wyatt jumped overboard to get the box, the boat is swept away by the sea, and the passengers are unable to stop him. Mr. Wyatt died at the mercy of the sea.

The second element is mystery. First, he mentions there is an unusual number of ladies at sea. Adding to the mystery is the narrator's curiosity. He is amazed that Mr. Wyatt should need three rooms instead of two. He entertains two theories, one that a servant is coming along and two, that maybe there is extra baggage too valuable to be let out of his own care. Ironically, both theories are correct. There is also a mystery behind Mr. Wyatt's wife. He is astonished to find that she is plain-looking, and not at all the beautiful, intelligent woman the artist had enthusiastically described. He

once again is mystified when he sees the strange shape of the box, but he then decides his second theory is accurate. He still found it odd that Mr. Wyatt should keep the oblong box in his room. Even more odd is the fact that his wife sleeps in the third room. She leaves his room at eleven and goes back when he calls for her in the morning. Mr. Wyatt's insane laughter, when the narrator hints at the contents of the oblong box, is another clue to what seemed an endless mystery for the narrator. There is also the mystery of the storm. Why did the storm occur on this particular voyage?

In addition, to nature and mystery, there is another element. This element is one of deep romantic love. It is by no accident that Poe portrays the man as an artist. An artist is one who is especially sensitive to beauty and love. Mr. Wyatt had described his wife to the narrator as someone who is both beautiful and intelligent. He kept his wife's corpse in the oblong box every night and wept over her remains. As the storm grew worse and the mystery climbed to a climatic point, his mental condition deteriorated. When everyone abandoned the ship he refused to leave the side of the woman he loved, and died so that he could be with her always.

Edgar Allan Poe recognized the use of atmosphere as a useful tool in developing a plot. In the "Oblong Box" he creates three forms of atmosphere. Nature, mystery, and love build the story up and bring it down, and make it engrossing for the reader.