Moby-Dick ends with a symptomatic image of mourning. The final, desolate image of Ishmael floating atop the coffin meant for his bosom friend is symptomatic of the grief that suffuses American literature. Ishmael shares his survivor's guilt with such literary compeers as Hester Prynne, Natty Bumppo, and Augustine St. Clare, better known as the disconsolate father of little Eva. These and other instances of personal mourning do not stand apart from larger collective traumas bound up with the nightmarish history of the hemisphere, including the Middle Passage and the unceasing wars against indigenous peoples. While the history of slavery and racial violence can reduce mourners to silence, mourning also prompts an equally intense literary outpouring of poems, elegies, sermons, and narrative. This body of writing, as Desirée Henderson carefully shows, included not just hackneyed laments and other formulaic gestures but also a rich tradition of experimentation that ranges from Hannah Foster's The Coquette to Walt Whitman's anti-monumental poems for the assassinated Abraham Lincoln. For Henderson, grief is not simple and direct but is always routed through generic forms such as eulogies for presidents, pietistic narratives about fallen women, and conduct books for mourners. Genre, as manifested by these forms, threatens to make death generic in ways that occlude the particularity
of the deceased, who is simultaneously exalted and reduced to a type. But as the author is quick to point out, the limits of genre also prove generative for writers. Reacting against memorial discourse, they experience loss in decidedly unconventional ways.

Henderson’s study of grief in America during the long nineteenth century follows important work on mourning in humanities discourse, more broadly construed. A key text in this critical tradition is Sigmund Freud's 1917 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia,” which distinguishes the unconscious pathology of the melancholic subject from the normal reaction of the mourner consciously processing his or her loss. Judith Butler, for example, extends this Freudian distinction to the formation of a so-called normative sexual subject. The true melancholic, she argues, is the straight man or woman who cannot completely grieve the loss of same-sex desire. The psychoanalytic model of grief has also been applied in studies of race (Ann Anlin Cheng's The Melancholy of Race), postcolonialism (Paul Gilroy's Postcolonial Melancholia), and American literature (Dana Luciano's Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America). Henderson, however, does not use the language of psychoanalysis. Instead, she studies grief in the culturally materialist zone of Civil War cemeteries, funeral processions, formal rituals of bereavement, and, most significantly, in the visible materiality of the text. So while historians of the nineteenth century such as Gary Laderman and Drew Gilpin Faust have focused on embalming and other tactile encounters with the dead (and Henderson dutifully cites this scholarship), this book shows how the dead leave tracks on the printed page. Printed representations of headstones appear on the final pages of more than one early American novel about seduced women. The publication history of Whitman's elegiac volume of the Civil War, Drum-Taps, bears the material imprint of the dead: since its production was interrupted by Lincoln's assassination, the original set of poems had to
accommodate insertions and sequels. In Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Gates Ajar*, readers learn how flowers are pressed between the pages of a mourner's diary to hide expressions of sorrow that are deemed too distressing. These three examples, ranging from the 1790s to the 1860s, help to show how Henderson's study "shifts the terrain" of grief work "from the psychological to the material realm" (124).

For Henderson, however, literary expression is most tangibly shaped not so much by the presence of the dead as by the force of genre. The impersonal and formulaic expectations of traditional memorial discourse, she argues, always threaten to stifle the particularity and individuality of the deceased. At early American funerals for women, sermons tended to de-individualize the departed, converting her into moral lessons about proper conduct and virtue. In Henderson’s view, such sermons came laden with an ideal image of womanhood, which was heavy weight for the dead to bear. But in three epistolary novels--*Charlotte Temple*, *The Power of Sympathy*, and *The Coquette*, Henderson finds specimens of a counter-discourse memorializing women whose sexual lives do not measure up to this chaste ideal. Literary forms like these, Henderson argues, “were developed to accomplish what the funeral sermon could not: depict and lament the deaths of imperfect women” (23).

But who or what stands behind this development? If deformations of genres do emerge, what forces produce such innovation within literary history? These questions are not answered by somewhat imprecise appeals to “the reader” who, for instance, sympathetically experiences the plight of tragic heroines of the early republic. A hypothetical reader cannot explain how genres change and develop. Nevertheless, since I often teach epistolary novels, I must say that this chapter will change my approach by providing greater contextualization about how Foster
and others were writing against a prevailing memorial discourse that typified women as ideal but lifeless objects.

Novels vs. sermons: genres, for Henderson, are saturated with discursive antagonisms that outline a landscape where dominant literary representations are adapted and even rejected outright. The book’s second chapter sets William Apess’s famous eulogy for King Philip against standard patterns of memorialization appearing in the hundreds of orations written after the death of George Washington. In grieving for the fallen icon of Native American defiance, Apess’s text “both uses and disrupts the traditional practice and purpose of the eulogy” (62). Perhaps itself a generic feature of much literary criticism, this narrative of resistance also informs the following chapter on slave cemeteries and burials, which explains how Frederick Douglass converts “grief into resistance” (95). Yet Henderson does not romanticize Apess’s eulogy as pure opposition, for his idealization of King Philip reanimates the problems of de-individualization first noted as an effect of eighteenth-century funeral sermons for women. That is, Apess mourns not the “death of one man but the destruction of a people” (64). Likewise, Douglass struggles to commemorate individual slaves erased by generic conventions. While proslavery novels often invoked slave funerals to envision idealized portraits of slavery’s final and everlasting harmony, Douglas aims to represent the dead by absence, contrasting his visit to his former master’s grave with his lack of knowledge about the location of his mother’s or grandmother’s remains. If Douglass famously begins his 1845 slave narrative by pointing out that he, like most slaves, has “no accurate knowledge” of their birthdates (Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass [Tribeca 2011] 1), Henderson reads across his three autobiographies to show how this gap continues into death. Within the geography of slavery, where do the remains of lost loved ones
lie? Henderson thus highlights what is perhaps the strangest of all forms of materiality—aporia—to show how psychological loss corresponds to a tear in social fabric.

This probing of the materials of grief continues in the final two chapters, which use the poetry of Whitman and Emily Dickinson as anchor texts. Whitman yearns to know whether national memory is democratic or hierarchical. In the wake of the Civil War’s bloodshed, does the newly healed nation fixate upon the rows upon rows of ordinary dead, or does it monumentalize the loss of extraordinary individuals? Do Americans revere impassive monuments like the Lincoln Tomb Historical Site in Springfield, Illinois, or do they honor the procession of diminutive tombstones at Gettysburg National Military Park? Whereas the first confirms the identity and enshrines the home of a president, the soldiers' graves, as Henderson astutely notes, were "determined by where the individual died rather than where he had lived, a shift in perception very much at odds with the burial and memorial practices of the time" (101). Even so, the humbleness of the tombstone, which "draws the eye down and calls for intimate recognition of an individual life" (106), offsets the imposing heights of monumental architecture. Such observations lend this study a grittiness that is sometimes absent from more psychologically inflected studies of mourning.

Henderson applies her knowledge of material culture to the lyricism of Whitman, especially in "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd." Tropes play a role a revealing role in Henderson’s analysis of the poem, but what might be pushed and clarified is the relationship of tropes to genre. If, etymologically speaking, tropes suggest turning, does Whitman's reliance on tropes about unknown soldiers suggest a troping or "turning" of genre? Do tropes allow mourners to turn over—in the sense of both mulling over a possibility and using a spade or shovel to break up the soil—the formal expectations and structures that constitute genres?
Henderson does not take up these questions directly. Nevertheless, her compelling argument that "Lilacs" keeps Lincoln unburied offers a rich matrix for re-reading the poem in this light.

The role of lyricism within the materiality of bereavement becomes still more pronounced in the concluding section of the book. Contrasting Phelps's Gates Ajar to what Henderson identifies as Dickinson's conduct poems, this chapter takes "a material culture approach" (128) that foregrounds typography, ink, binding, and so on. Nicely fleshing out the hypothetical reader of the first chapter, Henderson here presents concrete textual features as the visible symptom of the reader's dejection and melancholy. For instance, the observation that the dew-laced flowers pressed into Mary's diary in Phelps's novel will discolor and warp the pages reveals how the attempt to smooth over grief disrupts the text. Somewhat predictably, perhaps, Henderson finds in Dickinson's poems a like refusal to abide normative expectations about the proper display of feelings.

How well, then, does Henderson meet our own expectations for a book about the materiality of sadness in nineteenth-century American literature? One answer is that this book helps us to remember that grief, especially since September 11, 2011 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, is also a complex and undeniable experience in the twenty-first-century United States. In light of this awareness, the clarity of Henderson's writing, her attention to cultural detail, and her diligent engagement with literary criticism might provide some modicum of intellectual solace.