

Introduction

Words, Flesh, and Spirit

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

—1 Corinthians 13:11

Professor Samuel Edward Warren loved to save boys and young men from sin, especially boys who struck him as pretty and young men who seemed sensitive or confused. An opportunity arose one day in 1860 as he walked the unpaved streets of Troy, New York: a loose ball from a boys' game bounced into his path. Deep in thought as he tended to be on his walks, the grave young professor may have been too slow to stoop and make the catch, or perhaps he was disinclined to touch the grubby toy with his fingers. He simply turned his foot to stop the ball and watched as the pursuing boy ran up to him. The child had been cursing, much to Warren's chagrin, but his profanity stopped and his frown cleared when he saw what the bearded gentleman had done. He flashed a brilliant smile before recovering the ball. As the boy ran back to his friends the professor walked on alone, pondering what had just happened.

Two lives, two very different consciousnesses, had briefly crackled into contact, and the encounter had seemed blessed. Warren had succeeded, he wrote, in performing God's work on this "providential occasion of putting an end to another's sin."¹ But the human connection was weak and fleeting, a pale ghost of the full-blooded engagement with

young sinners that Warren had once enjoyed. In his adolescence, Warren had cultivated intense friendships with slightly younger boys. He would draw, read, and sing with them, and when the time felt right he would engage them in conversation on the state of their souls. With a few, he became intimate, sealing their Christian brotherhood with kisses and loving embraces in bed.

There, then, and among Warren's sort of people—affluent Northeasterners in the years before the Civil War—such behavior was understood very differently from how it would be today. Emotionally intense and physically affectionate pairings were commonplace among “youths”: males and females in the transitional phase of life between young childhood and mature adulthood. These “romantic friendships,” as scholars have called them, were not seen as signs of a homosexual orientation in either partner. Friends held hands and hugged, and shared beds for affection as well as convenience. “Physical contact was an incidental part of sharing a bed, but it happened—and in the context of a very affectionate relationship, this contact could express warmth or intimacy. It could even express erotic desire,” observed one of the early scholars of male romantic friendship, Anthony Rotundo. “A wide spectrum of possible meanings, from casual accident to passion, could be felt in the touch of a bedmate. In the absence of a deep cultural anxiety about homosexuality, men did not have to worry about the meaning of those moments of contact.” As the evidence is thin, scholars such as Richard Godbeer have been cautious in discussing the extent of erotic behavior between men in such circumstances, thus seeming to imply asexuality. William Benemann has leaned in the other direction, emphasizing that “a romantic friendship might indeed have included a sexual component. . . . A fluidity to male intimacy admitted a wide repertoire of physical expression.” The frequency of sexual behavior is impossible to determine, but the point is that romantic friendship (and the practice of bed sharing with which it often overlapped) afforded opportunities for two males to ease comfortably into erotic relations.²

Americans had not yet come to see sexual preferences as distinguishing markers of personal identity, symptoms of an inherent nature as heterosexual or homosexual. The antebellum Northeast, in which Warren grew up and developed his relationships, was generally accepting of male love before full adulthood. Expressions of affection might be unusually strong, but love between youths was accepted and admired, understood to be rooted in emotions even if it was expressed physically. Such feelings

could be problematic only if love turned to unrestrained lust and led to sinful actions—notably sodomy, considered an egregious crime far different from mere caressing. The erotic side of intimate friendships was winked at among male youths, but was expected to be left behind with the start of careers, marriages, and full adulthood. The friendships, as they receded into fond memories, suggested to most observers no lasting alternative to marrying a woman.³ Gradually, in their twenties, friends and bedmates moved off into marriages, leaving behind a shrinking minority of bachelors. Many men whose strongest erotic desires were for women remained bachelors by choice. Having experienced same-sex intimacies as precursors to adult intercourse with women, they embraced a bachelor subculture and a mature sexuality focused on the brothel. It was a very different matter for bachelors to seek same-sex encounters with youths, or to habitually engage in full sexual relations with other men—though the bachelor subculture in big cities such as New York did provide such opportunities.⁴

Men who preferred males to females must have faced the end of youth as a time of anxious transition or painful loss, as their field of potential lovers contracted drastically. This suspicion seems unavoidable, but historians have uncovered limited documentary evidence through which we can explore such an experience. That is what this book will do, using the previously unexamined journals of that introspective professor, Samuel Edward Warren, who lived in Massachusetts and upstate New York from 1831 to 1909. These journals provide a glimpse into profound desires for, and relationships with, other males. They reveal first the freedom and sensuality of youthful romantic friendships, then an attempt to join with younger men in a spirit of loving mentorship, and then the tortured introspection of an adult whose age seemed to shut him out from an idyllic lost world.

Warren's deepest sense of identity throughout the period covered by the journals was as a Christian—first a Congregationalist and then an Episcopalian. He had seen no conflict in his teenage years and early twenties between his love of God and his love of youths. In mature adulthood, though, as his friends and peers drifted off into relationships with women, Warren's encounters with other males began to feel odder and more shameful. Protestant religious communities offered some of his contemporaries the chance to build loving relationships with those of the same sex, but Warren proved unsuccessful in this respect. By the spring of 1860, when he ruminated in his journal about the incident with the

ball, the twenty-eight-year-old Warren had become painfully aware of a struggle between his higher spiritual nature—which aspired to the purity of angels—and what he called “the freight train of animal life below.”⁵ He was trying to redirect his affections into a dignified fatherly role, but he missed the freedoms and pleasures of youth. When the smiling boy ran back to his ballgame, Warren must have resumed his solitary walk with a heavy heart and a grim determination to trust in God.

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My sense of Warren’s life began (as all things are said to begin) with words: neatly inked words in a graceful running hand. I came across his words as I was rummaging through a box of old, poorly catalogued diaries in the University of Connecticut’s special collections. Skimming through his school news and notes of sermons, I was startled to find a page that had been carefully edited. In a passage that began, “Last night my dear John slept with me . . .,” the words immediately following had been scraped from the page and “we enjoyed ourselves” had been written to partially fill the gap. The passage went on to reveal that the two enjoyed themselves “beyond even my expectations. We had the . . . best time that ever could be, before going to sleep. We woke up and frolicked a little then went off a little after five as he had to be at home early.”⁶ If the author was willing to say this much, I wondered, what had he chosen to conceal, and why?

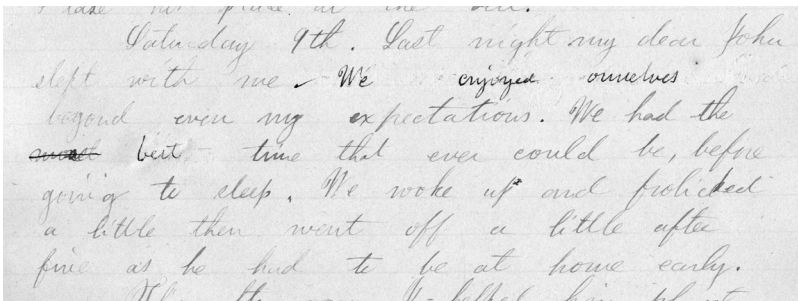


Figure I.1. Part of the entry for June 9, 1849, from Volume 2 of Warren’s journal. Courtesy, Archives and Special Collections, Thomas Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Conn.

People's lives are much more complicated than the stories they tell about themselves, even if they try to be candid, which Warren certainly did not. Amid all the simplifying and clarifying needed for a story to make sense and to satisfy the author, the written record leaves out a lot. What remains is often like a fiction—a rather bloodless fiction that presents the diarist or autobiographer as the protagonist of a drama, meeting and overcoming challenges. The crafting of one's life story allows opportunities for reinventing the self, as the literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe, following the insights of the feminist philosopher Judith Butler. Although individuals feel the pressure of many cultural norms in their daily life, Smith and Watson argue, the very multiplicity of these norms offers some freedom of choice both in behavior and identity. The individual can choose different behaviors and identities for different contexts of self-presentation, including in written words. "Both the unified story and the coherent self are myths of identity," they write. "We are always fragmented in time, taking a particular or provisional perspective on the moving target of our pasts, addressing multiple and disparate audiences. Perhaps, then, it is more helpful to approach autobiographical telling as a performative act."⁷ Thus, the calculated, semifictional life story bears only a partial resemblance to a real life—a squalling human mess conceived and birthed in a chaos of raw emotions and moaning physicality. The emotions and physicality of lived experience are only dimly glimpsed in the written record.

I have spent nearly a decade with Warren now, struggling to know him through his words. I have read all of the journals and letters I can find, most of his published articles on education and religion, parts of his textbooks on mechanical drafting, and a short autobiographical essay.⁸ The journals are the richest but trickiest sources. Warren kept a journal in various forms from shortly before his fifteenth birthday until a few months before his thirty-first. At first he tried to make entries every day, typically in the evening or on Sunday afternoons, but he allowed gaps of several months when he neglected the habit, and by the end he was making only occasional entries.⁹ Interrupted by missing volumes and numerous excisions of text, the journals tell an incomplete story of his experiences and thoughts from the mid-1840s through the early 1860s. Four of a numbered series of eight volumes have inexplicably come to rest at four different archives, in Connecticut, New York, and Delaware.¹⁰ The remaining four numbered volumes cannot now be located and may

have been destroyed. Two diaries of “thoughts” followed the numbered journals, filled with decreasingly frequent ruminations on religion, slavery, youth, and other topics that interested him. Within these surviving six volumes are references to at least three more missing volumes: a volume of “heart reveries,” a “journal” of his friendship with a group of boys he called the Dry River Brotherhood, and at least one “diary of daily items.” Warren also alluded to drawing books, an account book, and a scrapbook. He mentioned plans to keep an additional daily diary of the Dry River Brotherhood, a collection of notes on sermons, a book of good stories to use in social settings, and a book of sentiments that he could inscribe in autograph volumes. Much has been lost, but the amount that remains is impressive. The six surviving volumes, richly introspective but unused by previous scholars, contain a total of more than 850 pages and well over one hundred thousand words. Warren’s journals and letters, on top of his early textbooks, added up to a staggering heap of literary production during the 1850s and early 1860s. He kept publishing throughout the 1860s, 1870s, and beyond, but his surviving personal writings became scarce. The second thought diary ended in the summer of 1862 with gloomy anticipations of a companion’s death, realized a few weeks later when his first lover, Dicky Derby, was shot through the head at the battle of Antietam. After that, only brief personal references appeared in Warren’s publications and surviving letters.

The basic outline of his life is easily reconstructed. Samuel Edward Warren (1831–1909) was born in Newton, Massachusetts, near Boston, and grew up as the only child of deeply religious Congregational parents, Dr. Samuel Edward Warren and Ann Catherine Reed Warren. He attended an innovative model school in Newton, and then private schools at Andover and Newburyport. He studied engineering at RPI in the early 1850s. He stayed on after graduation as an instructor and then a professor of drawing and descriptive geometry. Called Edward by his friends and family, he appears as S. Edward Warren on the title pages of his many textbooks, in all of his correspondence, and in every professional context, evidently to distinguish him from the father whose full name he shared. He was a socially awkward man who took a conservative outlook on life. Slight in build, his thin face muffled in a heavy beard, he watched the world through wary eyes. Although generally uninterested in marrying a woman, he placed a high value on his moral reputation, career, social status, and faith. As he gained prominence with the publication of his textbooks in the 1860s he looked for more lucrative positions and was

hired in 1872 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, located then in Boston's Back Bay, which allowed him to move back to his hometown. He lasted only three academic years at MIT. He was fired in 1875 for reasons that are not fully explained in surviving Institute records, and his teaching career came to an end around the time of forty-fourth birthday. Warren continued to live in Newton with his mother and an immigrant housemaid, whom he eventually married in 1884. Little further information survives about his reclusive final years. He died in 1909 at the age of seventy-seven.¹¹ There remain large questions, probably unanswerable. What was the extent of Warren's sexual involvement with other males? What was the real reason for his dismissal from MIT? Why didn't he find a new permanent teaching position? Did he form new friendships with other men and boys after his early retirement? Why did he marry? Why didn't he destroy all the journals or ensure that his widow would do so?

Warren revised the journals after he wrote them. In the 1850s and 1860s, he tried to remove evidence of passionate emotions and intense personal relations. He ripped out pages; he blacked out words; he scraped the ink from portions of numerous pages and wrote new, shorter entries in the space. Warren wrote and revised his journals with a growing awareness of potential readers, whom he hoped could profit from his example. He sensed that his contemporaries would find his revised story persuasive because it conformed to their expectations of what human relationships were like: intimacy with others could grow from a sincere and open expression of one's inner self. The problem as Warren came to understand it was that his inner self was flawed by unruly passions that he should have outgrown. He could no longer risk fully unveiling his heart to the people he knew. Resigned to loneliness in this life, he imagined that his journal would provide a posthumous link with loving companions, if some judicious revisions could turn him into a lovable character. The final document reveals his idea of a resolution: it is the story of a Christian serving God by mentoring younger males. Yet the later entries suggest he doubted his success.

Few journals exploring sexuality survive from the American nineteenth century. Antebellum New Englanders left copious letters and diaries that document their friendships, but they say little about their physical desires and couplings. As a result, historians trying to understand sexuality before the end of the nineteenth century confront discouraging limitations in the source material. One can find discussion of sex in legislation, judicial records, racy newspapers, novels, and reform literature, but few surviving

personal papers show how typical heterosexuals experienced sexuality in their daily lives. Such potentially embarrassing documents, probably rare to begin with, must have been destroyed later by their writers, recipients, or heirs.¹² Scholars of sexuality between men, too, have found sparse first-person evidence. With the exception of literary works, much of the available nineteenth-century material originated directly or indirectly from efforts at condemning and prosecuting sodomy. This may have skewed historical interpretation by exaggerating the influence of persecution on the nineteenth-century experience of same-sex desire. Further, despite the recent emergence of archives and counterarchives of sexuality, scholarship in queer history has been complicated by longstanding archival practices that had the effect of concealing material from view. “Even when references to same-sex attractions, affairs and relationships can be found in historical sources,” writes the scholar Craig Loftin, “such references are scattered, institutionally unnoted, and difficult to recover.”¹³

Warren’s journals and letters (themselves scattered and unclearly catalogued) can help us better understand erotic relationships that had not yet become menaced by modern anxieties about homosexuality, were only partially addressed by Christian tradition, and were incompletely restricted by law. Here it is important to briefly note the prevailing scholarly consensus that the modern Western idea of homosexuality did not emerge until the late nineteenth century, long after the years covered by Warren’s diary. Certainly there is nothing new about men lusting for each other and having sex with each other (or women doing the same thing), but same-sex desire has been expressed, experienced, and understood differently in different historical eras. One familiar version of this argument, put forth by Michel Foucault and other scholars, is that the very words *homosexual* and *homosexuality* didn’t exist until the late 1860s, after which the concept spread through medical literature in the 1880s and 1890s; this pseudo-scientific idea constructed the homosexual as a distinct “species,” whereas previously same-sex intercourse was merely an act that did not define one’s identity. The social and cultural construction of homosexuality produced what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called our society’s “radically disrupted continuum . . . between sexual and nonsexual male bonds.” The homo/heterosexual definition would mark and calcify many other binary categories, including masculine/feminine and public/private.¹⁴

Following much scholarly debate over whether homosexuality is socially constructed as Foucault would have us believe, or whether it is rooted in the “essential” and timeless inclinations of individuals, the

classicist David Halperin offered a reformulation of the question. Halperin posits that before the late nineteenth century there were four distinct, long-standing “traditions of discourse pertaining to aspects of what we now define as homosexuality.” These included first, the idea of effeminacy, which was a style of behavior that did not necessarily mean the man was sexually attracted to other males; second, pederasty or “active” sodomy, which characterized a man whose behavior was masculine; third, passivity or inversion, associated with a man who was obviously womanly and subordinate in sexual behavior; and fourth, friendship or male love, which was not necessarily sexual. Halperin suggests that these traditions all contributed to the development of the modern concept of homosexuality, which helps explain its persisting internal contradictions. One appealing aspect of Halperin’s formulation is that it conforms nicely to the insight in queer theory that identity is multivalent and mutable; each individual can draw on multiple codes of behavior and multiple identities in choosing his self-presentation at any moment.¹⁵ Warren’s own tendency was toward Halperin’s category of male love, edging into sexual territory.

Male love in antebellum America was not yet haunted by the specter of homosexuality, nor was it understood to be biblically condemned, contrary to what we might assume in a twenty-first-century moment when some evangelicals try to “pray away the gay.” Heather White, a scholar in religion and queer studies, observes that not until the mid-twentieth century did Americans read the word *homosexual* in the Bible. That neologism, which had been coined in 1868, was inserted into the first edition of the Revised Standard Version in 1946. Only then, White writes, were the Bible’s references to sexual sin “retroactively sorted into the binary of the therapeutic grid,” which sharply distinguished homosexual from heterosexual acts and ascribed each to deep-seated personal inclinations.¹⁶

That is not to say that sex between men in nineteenth-century America was considered morally benign. Since the colonial period, as Richard Godbeer has observed, Americans were physically demonstrative in their friendships, but “were taught to believe that all sex outside marriage—whether masturbation, casual fornication, premarital sex, adultery, or sodomy—was driven by innate moral corruption inherited from Adam and Eve.” Nineteenth-century religious writers were intensely hostile to sodomy. The Andover theologian Moses Stuart, in an 1832 commentary on the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans, interpreted *Romans* 1:27 as specifically condemning the “horrible vice” of sodomy. “What else could

be expected from those who sunk themselves far below the brute creation, but that their moral sense would be degraded, their conscience 'seared with a hot iron,' and all the finer feelings and delicate sensibility of life utterly extinguished?" Such behavior would undoubtedly destroy the sinner's physical and mental health. But Americans in practice allowed some latitude for other erotic actions. Spilling of semen was frowned upon, both for moral and health reasons, but mutual gratification was apparently no worse than indulgence in the "solitary vice," which moral reformers considered a dangerous plague that threatened the manhood of America. Solitary masturbation might even be more dangerous, as it lacked any mitigating social element and relied entirely on the fevered imagination. Nineteenth-century Americans would have seen non-penetrative eroticism as sinful excess at worst—or, more generously, as the misguided high spirits of healthy young males. It fell into the category of what the scholar Anna Clark has called "twilight moments," defined as "sexual practices and desires that societies prohibit by law or by custom, but that people pursue anyhow, whether in secret or as an open secret."¹⁷

Laws condemned certain sexual acts, but not until the very late nineteenth century were the laws specifically aimed at suppressing same-sex relations. In New York State, where Warren lived as a young adult, state statutes forbade rape (involving penile penetration of a vagina) and sodomy—"the detestable and abominable crime against nature"—too vile to be clearly defined in statute but understood by courts to involve any penile penetration of an anus, carrying a penalty of up to ten years in prison. Acts of sodomy were illegal regardless of the age or sex of the partners; if an adult man sodomized a child, both were culpable if the child had consented. Though broadly framed, the sodomy law was enforced usually in the context of sexual assault. Fellatio was disreputable, like other forms of non-procreative sex, but was not illegal in New York until 1886. Statutory rape laws were lax. Until 1886, when New York raised the age of consent to sixteen, vaginal sex between a man and a girl was punishable only if the girl was under ten years of age, or if the man had coerced her. Sexual activity between men and boys was not illegal in mid-nineteenth-century New York as long as no sodomy was involved. In 1855, when Warren slept with and "carressed" a fifteen-year-old, no law prohibited him from doing so.¹⁸

Warren and his contemporaries would have been puzzled by the idea that physical sexuality should be the central reference point for understanding intimacy. They would have placed emotion at the center,

and would have seen this emotion as originating from the spirit or the heart, not from the body. Romantic feelings were not assumed to be linked to sexuality.¹⁹ Well into his adult years, Warren understood even his physical expressions of affection as signs of his heart's strong feelings. If his actions were excessive, then perhaps they reflected immoderate feelings that were inappropriate for a grown man. Instead of gaining a mature discipline over his youthful sentiments, he had allowed them to grow into undisciplined passions that overpowered his judgment. The problem was not a sexual orientation rooted in a queer body—such an idea was alien—but what he called “an outbreak of the constitutional excess of the emotional over the rational.”²⁰

Warren believed his feelings were not wrong in themselves, and his contemporaries would have agreed. The experience of strong emotion was celebrated in antebellum America as never before. Deep feeling and sincere expression were the marks of greatness in art, music, and literature, as they had begun to be with the emergence of European Romanticism in the eighteenth century. People with aspirations to cultural sophistication cultivated a keen “sensibility,” and felt themselves lacking if their feelings were insufficiently intense. Changes in American Protestantism legitimized and reinforced this new culture of emotionality, as the historians Peter Stearns and John Corrigan have argued. Powerful sensations and feelings might have the sublime power to lift one's consciousness closer to the divine presence. Even Unitarians, known for their emphasis on rationality, saw deep feeling (if properly channeled) as one component of a balanced character.²¹

People in Warren's educated, affluent milieu expected and even celebrated the intense emotional bonds that could develop in all forms of human interaction. Nineteenth-century Americans were not as fastidious as we are in policing the boundaries of friendship, teaching, evangelism, and courtship. As the religious historian Shelby Balik observes in considering the social network of the lovers Charity Bryant and Sylvia Drake, nineteenth-century lives were built on “layers of intimacy connected through different kinds of social ties.” Romantic relationships, friendship networks, and spiritual communities fit together seamlessly.²² A sincere connection between two minds or two souls might easily edge into territory that we would now call the erotic. While later generations would draw a sharp line between friendship and eroticism—placing many physical expressions of affection on the same side of the line as romantic love, sensual pleasure, and sexual intercourse—Warren's contemporaries saw subtle shading. A wide range of emotional and physical intimacy

was acceptable within the twilight edge of the erotic, especially between youths of the same sex.

In contrast to the Enlightenment tendency to consider friendship as a rational, masculine quality—a belief rooted in classical antiquity—antebellum Americans believed friendship flourished best among women (considered the more emotional sex) and sensitive men. Writers of fiction and philosophy placed emotional bonds at the core of friendship, disparaging rational considerations as selfish and peripheral.²³ As the following chapters will describe, New England educational reformers argued for new approaches to pedagogy, downplaying rote learning and striving to unlock the potential of the ordinary individual. They hoped that caring, inspirational teachers would inspire a love of learning, and would produce citizens better suited to life in a republic. American Protestantism was marked by a rising belief in an individual's power to create a personal relationship with God, and with a shift in emphasis from fear of damnation to love of Christ. Nineteenth-century religious devotion became more emotional, and the ideal relationship with God more intimate: a style of faith that some called "heart religion." Practices and theories of parenting too were becoming less authoritarian and more attuned to cultivating the sensibilities of the child. Teachers, parents, and God were all discussed less as dominating, punitive figures and more as caring friends.²⁴

Changes in these various areas of life reinforced each other, partly because some writers offered advice on multiple topics, and partly because changing outlooks transferred easily to different contexts. Antebellum Americans were still just beginning the long, modern project of compartmentalizing the functions of daily life. Work was beginning to be separated from leisure both temporally and spatially, and employers were giving up direct control over the lives of workers who had once lived under their roofs.²⁵ Parental authority remained the model of power in workplaces, schoolhouses, and churches, but in all these places parents were being reimagined in less authoritarian ways. The cultural trend toward "heart religion" and sensitivity offered Americans the opportunity to reimagine manliness in ways that countered the aggressive hypermasculinity that emerged as the dominant model in the Jacksonian era. Warren consistently identified himself as masculine in his diary, appears to have presented himself as such in personal interactions, and directed his desires toward similar males (with the possible exception of Dicky).²⁶ But his was a masculinity with an evangelical inflection. As early as

the Revolutionary era and lasting at least through the late nineteenth century, evangelical manliness distinguished itself by its firm insistence on righteous behavior, its acceptance of emotionality, its rejection of the rough sports and pleasures of normative masculinity, and its persistent expression of physical affection between men. As religious Americans were encouraged to act in ways that seemed feminized or at least gender neutral, men who followed this distinctive style of performing manhood were sometimes demeaned by those who did not share their faith. Yet with the expansion and growing influence of evangelical culture in the early to mid-nineteenth century, religious men such as Warren could find sufficient personal and societal acceptance.²⁷

Warren could see legitimate reasons to develop emotional bonds in all his interpersonal relations, as he talked with friends, taught his students, and struggled to bring souls to Christ. When the sincere outpourings of his heart met those of a youth, he believed, intense friendships might develop and physical affection might ensue. He believed discussion of faith and the soul were the basis for building what William Benemann has termed “romantic mentorship”—an affectionate relationship between an older and a younger male, possibly including sexual contact. Antebellum Americans had yet to develop a strong taboo against sexual contact between adults and teenaged children. There was still no clear idea of adolescence as a distinct biological and psychological life phase, only a sense of a lingering period of immaturity known as youth, roughly corresponding to the teenage years, in which the pubescent or newly postpubescent individual was not yet living independently.²⁸

The friendships described in his journals were emotional and spiritual. They were also unquestionably erotic. The journals explore not the bright hot center of male sexuality—penetrative intercourse—but the margins. Here in the soft glow of eroticism, a man such as Edward Warren could feel a shiver in meeting the gaze of a new friend. Here, in encounters framed by friendship, teaching, and evangelism, he saw a romantic aura that might or might not just be his imagination. Here, where glances and touches flickered with meaning, were the moments when he and a friend drew uncertainly nearer. And here are the nights when Warren kissed and caressed a friend in bed, and perhaps enjoyed other bodily pleasures for which he left no written record.²⁹ Laws were irrelevant to Warren’s relationships as long as he avoided sodomy. Only moral concerns were involved, and Warren felt those were manageable. Refusing to see a fundamental conflict between his faith and his desires, he hoped for a

communion of soul mates, a merging of personal intimacy and Christian love. Such friendships proved easy to develop within the free-spirited culture of mid-century youth, where Warren enjoyed affectionate bonds with three boys slightly younger than himself.

As he moved into adulthood, the social milieu of evangelical Protestantism seemed to offer a fertile field in which to cultivate relationships. Richard Godbeer, Bruce Dorsey, Rachel Hope Cleves, Janet Moore Lindman, and Jessica Warner have documented close same-sex friendships between devout Protestants in the early Republic, friendships that blended spirituality, tender feelings, and physical love. Unlike the intense but short-lived romantic friendships of youths, writes Warner, "the typical evangelical friendship would appear to have grown richer and stronger over time." Some of these friendships continued to be emotionally and physically demonstrative throughout adulthood, though Warner finds such behavior came into conflict with evangelical codes of restraint and self-control. Dorsey writes that evangelicals in the 1830s and 1840s rejected a tolerant vernacular sexuality and, amid conflict and scandal, imposed new restraints on behavior. Warner identifies a somewhat later transition, as a sense of formality chilled evangelical friendships in the 1850s and 1860s.³⁰

Warren remained hopeful as he reached adulthood in the 1850s that his relationships would serve God if they were premised on Christian love, even when expressed physically. He continued to believe that emotional intensity was a good thing, but as he matured he became more wary of the dangers of excess. Whether because of his own limited social skills, or the sparse network of potential companions in a small city, or his aversion to the disreputable bachelor subculture, or evangelicals' shrinking tolerance for exuberant physicality, Warren found it difficult in adulthood to develop satisfying relationships. He came to believe that his character was flawed by a shamefully immature weakness for sensuality, making it difficult to control himself when interacting with what he called "a warm hearted friend."³¹ Excessive feeling could contaminate his conversation and letters, alienating friends instead of drawing them closer. Excessive feelings could also lead him to caress a friend immoderately, with similar effects. Embarrassed by physical desires that exceeded those of his closest friends, he learned to be wary of adult sensuality, eventually to the point of distrusting the body below his chest as a necessary evil. Yet he believed that desire for other males was not the problem except when it became so extreme that bodily sensuality took priority over God. Since he thought his basic problem was

excess rather than a distinctive sexual orientation, he considered his example to be relevant to the religious experience of other Christians.

And so in the late 1850s and 1860s, Warren expected that the toned-down story of his life would be acceptable and helpful to his readers. His journals, as revised, were intended to be persuasive to Warren's contemporaries, and particularly to his imagined readers, who eventually resolved into his parents and a few close friends. The early journals openly described his affectionate relationship with other boys, and the later ones guardedly defended "the peculiar affection and relationship of benevolent manhood for genial youth."³² Warren hoped readers would find in his life story a plausible and inspirational tale of Christian moral progress. Thus, the journals can be read not just to understand Warren but to understand his world, as he saw it. He saw correctly that the culture in which he lived gave him the latitude to pursue loving friendships with other males in every important aspect of his life.

The chapters that follow will explore four different modes of social interaction that were salient in his Edward Warren's mind at particular phases of his life. The first three chapters consider in turn his early friendships, his teaching, and his efforts at evangelism (defined here as spreading the word of Christ in order to produce religious conversions). There is a rough chronological order to these thematic chapters, but inevitably some overlap, topically as well as chronologically; indeed, part of my argument is that these aspects of human experience could not be neatly separated in antebellum America. The fourth chapter considers the importance of "Fatherhood" in Warren's mature conceptualization of himself and his relationships with younger males. The idea of fatherhood provided Warren with an alternative way of understanding his role, allowing him to show manly affection without indulging the erotic feelings that had become too difficult to manage. Still single and childless in his forties, Warren told his cousin that he hoped to serve as "a universal father" to those who needed it. The Epilogue briefly sketches Edward Warren's life after 1862, when Warren's introspective writing ceased. The Epilogue traces what can be known about the abrupt termination of his career and his marriage to an immigrant housekeeper nineteen years his junior.³³

This book is a study of how Warren experienced personal intimacy in youth and young adulthood, and how he reinterpreted his experiences to meet the approval of others. I argue that the journals reveal, sometimes unintentionally, Warren's beliefs about what degrees of intimacy were socially acceptable for a male at each life stage. These beliefs, I argue,

can be placed in a larger American context of emotionally intense bonds in overlapping social relationships: friendship, teaching, evangelism, and courtship. Same-sex eroticism was accepted up to a point as an extension of youthful friendship. Pedagogy and religious conversion were said to be made more effective by sincere personal connections at any age. This context of expectations allowed intimacies of all sorts to flourish, and it allowed Warren to follow to some degree his sexual inclinations.

The book will examine a moment in the past to see what it can tell us about the larger context.³⁴ I certainly would not claim that Edward Warren represents the men of the United States, a diverse nation with regional differences further complicated by subcultures linked to class, religion, and ancestry (and in the antebellum South by the enormous burden of slavery). Still, Warren, like each of us, was both his own person and the creature of the world in which he lived. His personality developed in interaction with the people and the broader culture around him, and it bears the marks of those connections. His extraordinarily thoughtful journals allow us to explore how emotions, desires, and behaviors evolved as a youth and then a man reached out for fellowship in antebellum America. Ultimately, I seek to root the specialized study of same-sex desire in the deeper historical context of American emotional culture. In creating a valued role for the emotions in interpersonal relations, nineteenth-century Americans made room for intimacy between youths and—in different ways—between men. Youths desiring other males did not have to choose between strictly asexual forms of romantic friendship and covert participation in urban subcultures where sexual fulfillment carried the risk of arrest. S. Edward Warren's revised journals reveal an attempt to follow same-sex desires within a mainstream, Christian life.

The book is subtitled "A Story of Faith and Queer Desire in Antebellum America," but really there are two such stories here: the one Warren told in the pages of his journal, and the one I assemble using the journal and additional evidence. Both are incomplete stories, each one selecting certain pieces of information and omitting others that seem insignificant or are unavailable. Warren and I have both struggled to make sense of the overly abundant, disorderly details of his life. He struggled to do so day by day, sometimes in anguish, and then manipulated his journals to better reflect the resolution that seemed most satisfactory. Hoping that his experience might prove beneficial to his readers, he concealed and distorted his most troubling challenges. In writing my own story of his life, I have had to rely in large part on Warren's words, respecting the

man for his moral seriousness but aware that his story is not to be fully trusted. Warren did not imagine that there might be such a skeptical reader of his story. The very survival and public availability of the journals is an improbable accident, one that he may have wished to prevent. In the pages that follow, I will examine both the solutions he tried to craft and the doubts and desires he tried to suppress as he sought intimacy with warmhearted friends.