

LIT 315/615

Monday/Thursday, 12:45-2:00

Classroom: SIS 15

Office Hours: Monday/Thursday, 2:15-4:45

Tuesday, 3:30-4:30, and by appointment

Professor Marianne Noble

x2988

214 Battelle

[mnoble@american.edu](mailto:mnoble@american.edu)

### **Intimacy in Antebellum America**

The engagement with others in the fullness of relationship is the foundation which sustains us in facing life and enduring suffering, the motivation for development from birth until the very end.

(Halling 184)



In this course, we will explore the experience of intimacy in antebellum America, as described by literary authors of the period. Intimacy is an experience that is difficult to put into words, and these authors have worked hard to capture what many (if not all) people desire and sometimes experience. We will explore these **Research Questions**:

- What was intimacy like in antebellum America?
- What forms of connection make for intimacy, as opposed to companionship, sympathy, shared interests, mere human contact, and so forth?
- How did (does) ideology affect the way people conceive(d) of intimacy?
- How does it compare with our experiences of and ideals of intimacy today?
- Why do people seek out intimacy with such intensity?
- What causes the fear of intimacy?
- How has the experience of intimacy been affected by race, gender, and sexual orientation?
- What are the tropes, metaphors, figures of speech, and narratives in which people in antebellum American thought of intimacy?
- Is your own understanding of intimacy universal, or is it culturally specific?

We will work as a research team, seeking to understand intimacy in antebellum America. I will be your research guide and companion, but you will not find in me answers nor a pre-set agenda. I have some ideas, of course, but the findings of this course will come from the whole team, not from “the sage on the stage.” I have provided some texts that I think will be fruitful and some research questions for exploration, but the insights and conclusions will come from you, not me. The texts I have selected take into account the fact that intimacy can take many forms: mothers and children, same-sex friends, different-sex friends, men and women courting, husbands and wives, homosexual lovers, self and God, and so on. They also reflect an understanding that the experience of intimacy is affected by race, gender, age, culture, and background, as well as by the character of the individual involved.

### Course goals

- Gain understanding of what intimacy is.
- Gain understanding of the value of intimacy in our own life, and the causes of failures of intimacy
- Gain understanding of how our experience of intimacy today both resembles and differs from that of 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans—and how our ideas might be an outgrowth of theirs.
- Gain understanding of the effect of ideology on emotions.
- Develop and refine the ability to research and write a long essay in the field of literature
- Practice and assess the value of collaborative learning

Research Paper: For the first ten weeks of the course, we will intensively read in the assigned literary works. In some cases, we will not read full works but only enough to get a sense of the nature of intimacy involved in that text. In the final month of the course, you will work on a fifteen-page research paper on some aspect of intimacy in America. There are a variety of ways to approach the research for a literary research paper, and we will work together to discover which approach will most interest you.

The goal is for you to get excited about some topic, and to pursue the additional reading because it is answering questions you care about. Your research should excite you! During the last month of class, class meetings will be devoted to lectures on theory, psychology, and the process of writing a research paper. These will be designed to help everyone in the class think critically about their research and to help in their writing. At the same time, you and I will have one-on-one conferences to help you craft a feasible reading list for your research paper and work with it. And you will then read those materials and write the paper that grows out of that reading. The last three class periods (one of which is the scheduled final exam period) will be devoted to presentations of your research findings. Please bear in mind: this paper is not a thesis. Don't get overwhelmed. Narrow your topic and have fun going deeper into it.

- The research paper might flesh out some of the **historical context** of a literary portrayal of intimacy. For example, if you choose to work on Harriet Jacob's

portrait of intimacy in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, you might read a variety of the recent historical studies of slave life and consider the representation of sexual or maternal intimacy in *Incidents* in its historical context.

- Or, you might read some current **psychological studies** of intimacy and the fear of intimacy and consider how that theory illuminates your study of—say—Emily Dickinson’s love poetry.
- Or, your research might involve **literary scholarship**: what have scholars said about Emerson’s friendships with men or those with female friends, or his relationship with his wife, or his love for his child? What interpretations have been presented of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Birth Mark,” and how does approaching that text from the perspective of failed intimacy provide an important vantage point?
- Yet another approach might be to focus on a particular **author**, read more of his or her works and his/her biography, and assess the treatment of intimacy in the author’s career.
- Another approach might be to approach the question from the perspective of **literary or cultural theory**, such as, for example, Lacan’s “The Mirror Stage,” or Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*.

Short Papers. You will write **seven** short (250-500 words) papers in the beginning of the course. I have offered a writing prompt for each reading. You can choose to write on one of these prompts, or on any topic of your own choosing. A good approach is to clearly express something that confuses you. Hopefully, an idea for longer paper will grow out of these, so you could think of these as ways of trying out fledgling ideas for your longer paper. Try to establish a clear idea text before coming in to class, so that you are ready to go with the discussion. You should **post these on blackboard before the class** in which the text is assigned, ideally **24 hours** before. I will comment on these, suggesting ways you could develop the idea. At the end of the semester, you will return all of them to me, along with my comments, and I will assign a composite grade based upon my impression of your thoughtfulness, serious engagement, and passion. Your paper should have a point, which it clearly establishes in the opening, and it should support it succinctly. There are a possible twenty prompts written; make sure you get your seven done before the window of opportunity closes.

Graduate Students. We will meet four extra times over the course of the course to further explore your findings. You will need to bring in ideas you want to discuss.

Communication: I tend to send a fair number of email messages over the semester, using Blackboard. Please make sure that you are forwarding all AU emails to the account you check regularly.

Participation. Don't mistake my critical engagement with your contributions for a belief that I think I'm right and you're wrong. I challenge your ideas out of respect, not out of disrespect. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable participating in class, please talk about this with me in my office hours.

Attendance. If you miss more than three classes, your grade may be lowered. If you miss more than five, it will be lowered. If you miss more than seven, you will fail. The only excuses are medical emergency or religious holiday.

Final Grades. I dislike this part of the course. However, our society requires it, and so in fairness I must lay out clear guidelines. I do so under duress.

Final grades will be calculated according to the following percentages:

Participation: 25%

Short papers: 25%

Annotated bibliography: 10%

Final Research Paper 40%

Academic Dishonesty: I dislike this part of the course even more. I believe in you and the essential value of your intellectual growth. Therefore, I take plagiarism and academic dishonesty very seriously, and I am required to report cases to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, whose policy is to fail students for the course. Please read the university's Academic Integrity Code closely, and be sure to ask me if you have any questions. The code is available online at <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm>.

In writing papers, you must properly cite all sources (1) directly quoted, (2) paraphrased, or (3) consulted in any fashion. Sources include all printed material as well as the Internet. Proper citation means using a standard citation format: MLA, APA, or Chicago.

It is also considered plagiarism if you merely rework source material, placing an author's thoughts in other words without contributing your own ideas. For that reason, you must include some kind of source note whenever drawing on someone else's interpretation. A source note can be a sentence or more in your paper, or it can be a footnote. A source note should clarify the extent to which your interpretation is indebted to your source, explaining both (1) what you use and (2) where you depart or differ from the source.

It is also considered plagiarism to submit drafts, response papers, and other informal assignments without properly citing sources and acknowledging intellectual debts.

**Failure for the course is the typical sanction in such cases.**

Emergency Preparedness: In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and

extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site ([www.prepared.american.edu](http://www.prepared.american.edu)) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

All instructions for pandemic closure will be posted on the "Announcements" page of our Blackboard site.

### **Schedule of Classes and Assignments**

Please do a little introductory web-based research on each text and author  
For every class, bring in some passages to discuss, ideas about them, and a sense of how they relate to the Research Questions.

**Monday, August 24:** Introduction

**Thursday, August 27:** De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*

Volume One, Chapter 3 ("Social Condition of the Anglo-Americans")

Volume Two, Section Two, Chapters 1 ("Why Democratic nations Show a More Ardent and Enduring Love for Equality than for Liberty") 2 ("Of Individualism in Democracies"), 10-13 ("Of the Taste for Physical Well-being in America," "Peculiar Effects of the Love of Physical Gratification in Democratic Times," "Why Some Americans Manifest a Sort of Spiritual Fanaticism," "Why the Americans are so Restless in the Midst of their Prosperity.")

Volume Two, Section Three, Chapters 2 ("Democracy leads to Ease and Simplicity"), 8 ("Influence of Democracy on Family"), 9 ("Education of Girls"), 10 ("The Young Woman as a Wife"), 12 ("How the American Views the Equality of the Sexes"), 13 ("How Equality Naturally Divides the Americans into Small Private Circles"), 19 ("Why There Are So Many Men of Ambition In the US But So Few Lofty Ambitions")

If you want, you could also look also at Volume Two, Part One, Chapters 8, 9, 13 ("Equality Suggests the Infinite Perfectibility of Man," "Aptitude for Science, Literature, the Arts", "Literary Characteristics of the DemocraticTimes").

(<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/>)

Blackboard Prompt: Do you think Tocqueville's characterization of the effect of individualism on social relations holds true today? How do you think it would

affect intimate relations between people? Do you think intimacy means anything different for Americans than it does for other people?

**Monday, August 31:** *The Minister's Wooing*. Chapters 1-12.

BB Prompt: On page 605, Stowe writes, "it is very seldom that the feeling of love, when once thoroughly aroused, bears any sort of relation to the reality of the object. It is commonly an enkindling of the whole power of the soul's love for whatever she considers highest and fairest; it is in fact the love of something divine and unearthly, which, by a sort of illusion, connects itself with a personality. . . . What Mary loved . . . was not the gay, young, dashing sailor . . . but her own ideal of a grand and noble man,-- such a man as she thought he might become." Do you agree with Stowe that true love idealizes in this way? Do you think that such idealization enhances or detracts from intimacy? Might such idealization be valuable at one stage of a relationship yet detrimental at another? How might Stowe's notions be inflected by ideologies of her time, place and religion?

**Thursday, September 3.** *The Minister's Wooing*. Chapters 13-24

BB Prompt: On page 732, Stowe writes, "the clear logic and intense individualism of New England . . . swept away all those softening provisions so earnestly clasped to the throbbing heart of that great poet of theology [St. Augustine, a Catholic]. No rite, no form, no paternal relation, no faith or prayer of church, earthly or heavenly, interposed the slightest shield between the trembling spirit and Eternal Justice. The individual entered eternity alone, as if he had no interceding relation in the universe." Do you think this kind of isolationism characterizes the relationships Stowe portrays in *TMW*? Do you think Protestantism continues to idealize hyper-individuated selves, and if so does this affect intimacy?

**Thursday, September 10.** *The Minister's Wooing*. Chapter 25-42.

BB Prompt: What promotes intimacy, in *TMW*, and what prevents it? OR, discuss the book in relation to your own experiences of intimacy.

**Monday, September 14.** Marianne Noble, "The Courage to Speak and Hear the Truth: Sympathy and Genuine Human Contact in *The Minister's Wooing*"

BB Prompt: Does this article help you understand intimacy in any way? Do you agree or disagree with any of it?

**Thursday, September 17.** Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/Fem> and then follow the link to: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/Fem/martineau.htm>

Blackboard Prompt: Do you think Martineau's characterizations of American social life remain true today? How do you think the characteristics she describes would affect intimate relations between people? Compare her ideas to those of Tocqueville and Stowe.

**Monday, September 21.** Opening 16 chapters of *Moby Dick* (you can skip chapters 6-9 if you want to).

BB Prompt: Do Ishmael and Queequeg experience intimacy? If so, what conditions enable them to experience it?

**Thursday, September 24.** Nathaniel Hawthorne. "Young Goodman Brown," "Wakefield," "Rappaccini's Daughter."

BB Prompts:

YGB: Try reading the story backwards: this is the story of a couple that experiences no intimacy over the course of their marriage. How might Hawthorne be using the story to explore the creation of a given psychological makeup that prevents intimacy.

W: What causes Wakefield's seeming sadism, and what might we learn from it about intimacy?

RD: In what way might attitudes like those of Giovanni (or those of the other men in the story) impede intimacy?

**Monday, September 28.** Hawthorne "The Birth Mark," "The Minister's Black Veil," "Ethan Brand." If possible, also find and read "The Artist of the Beautiful" on line.

BB Prompt: According to one of these stories, what is the psychology of intimacy, and/or why do people fear it? Consider possibly the role of the imagination in intimacy.

**Thursday, October 1.** Howe, *The Hermaphrodite*, Book 1, pages 1-89.

BB Prompt: Laurence is incapable of experiencing intimacy because he is incapable of having sexual relations. Why do you think Howe thinks sex is necessary for intimacy? What is wrong with platonic love? OR, do you personally resonate with Laurence's travails? i.e. do his problems with love reflect any of your own thoughts/experiences?

**Monday, October 5.** Howe, Introduction to *The Hermaphrodite*, and selections from *Passion Flowers*

Prompt: Do you buy Gary Williams's argument about *The Hermaphrodite*? OR, What are the tropes of intimacy in Howe's poetry?

**Thursday, October 8.** Walt Whitman. "Live Oak With Moss"  
(<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/liveoak.html> ); Hershel Parker,  
"The Real 'Live Oak, with Moss': Straight Talk about Whitman's "Gay  
Manifesto" (<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/anc.00157.html>);  
Whitman's "Live Oak with Moss," by Alan Helms.  
(<http://www.classroomelectric.org/volume3/price/lowm.php?inc=helms>)

Prompt: What do you think is the most intimate scene in "Live Oak with Moss"?  
Is it very intimate?

**Monday, October 12.** Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Children of Adam"  
Also, look at "Calamus"). Use the 1891-92 edition.  
<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/index.html>. Look also at the 1855  
edition, pages 57-64, using the Whitman Archive e-text version. This begins  
"Come closer to me . . ."

Prompt: In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman imagines a wordless union, in  
which meaning is poured from one person to another (or the author to us). This is  
very different from the talk-based intimacy Stowe idealized in *TMW*. Do you  
think that wordless intimacy is more or less intimate than talk-based intimacy?  
Do you think Whitman captures intimacy well? What—other than talk—enables  
intimacy to happen?

**Thursday, October 15.** Edgar Allan Poe, Kennedy's Introduction, "Ligeia," "The Fall  
of the House of Usher," "The Man of the Crowd"

**Monday, October 19.** Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson," "Tell-Tale Heart," "Black  
Cat," "The Sleeper," "Lenore," "For Annie," "To My Mother," "Annabel Lee".

**Thursday, October 22.** Louisa May Alcott, "Behind The Mask"  
(<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/AlcBehi.html>)

BB: What might Alcott be saying about the relationship between patriarchal  
ideologies and the experience of marital intimacy?

**Monday, October 26.** Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Prompt: How is the meaning of intimacy changed when a person is enslaved?  
What do you think of the choices Harriet (Linda) made with regard to her  
sexuality?

**Thursday, October 29.** Dickinson, *Open Me Carefully*. First third.

BB Prompt: What is the role of imagination in intimacy?

**Monday, November 2.** Dickinson, *Open Me Carefully*. Second third.

BB Prompt: How does ED's poetry respond to the longing for intimacy?

**Thursday, November 5. Martha Nell Smith class visit.** Reading: Dickinson, *Open Me Carefully*. Third third.

BB Prompt: What questions do you want to ask Martha Nell Smith?

**Monday, November 9.** Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World* (1-64 or 1-114)

Prompt: Do you think that the intimacy Warner describes between Ellen and her mother is typical of what intimacy is? Does this portrait of intimacy reveal anything to you about why people desire intimacy, or why they fear it? Also, does this portrait of intimate desire capture female desire better than male? Also, consider the intimate nature of discipline.

**Thursday, November 12. Turn in Research Proposals**

**Monday, November 16. Turn in Bibliographies**

**Thursday, November 19.**

**Monday, November 23. Turn in Annotated Bibliographies**

Thanksgiving!

**Monday, November 30**

**Thursday, December 3**

**Monday, December 7.** Presentations of research findings in groups of 5. Carefully time these to no more than 10 minutes, allowing five minutes for feedback. Pick the group's favorite one, and the whole class will hear and discuss the 7 favorite presentations on the next 2 days.

**Thursday, December 10.** Presentations. **Final papers due**

**Monday, December 14.** Presentations.

### **Brainstorming for Final Papers.**

Here are some ideas I came up with as I wrote this syllabus:

Compare Jacobs to Douglass

Explain one facet of how intimacy works, or fails to work, drawing upon psychological,, philosophical, or historical research.

Explore and learn from one of the following couplings:

Susan and Emily

Austin Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd

Hawthorne and his wife

Hawthorne and Melville

Lydia Sigourney and her husband

Julia Ward Howe and her husband

SGH and Charles Sumner

Stowe and Calvin

Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln

Emerson and Fuller, or Emerson and Thoreau, or Emerson and his wives, or

Emerson and his son, Waldo.

Jefferson and Sally Heming

The Beecher-Tilton scandal

Many parent child relationships

Slave marriages, or slave relations

Slaves and Masters

Theories of (fear of) intimacy applied to one of the course texts

Mothers and daughters vs. sons

Representations of hermaphrodites

Current analyses of the intersexed

Romantic ideals of friendship

The Bible on friendship and/or intimacy

Gay Whitman—representations of homosexual desire; homophobia; cultural context

Other homosexual couplings

The doctrine of “true womanhood” and its effect upon intimacy

Religious ideologies concerning the need to repress anger, and their effect upon intimacy

Intimate disciplinary strategies for children

Contemporary psychological theories: boundaries; empathy; mirror neurons;

Read Conduct Books presenting the “rules” for marriage and/or child-rearing and consider how they might explain certain attitudes towards intimacy.

Explore de Tocqueville and/or Martineau in greater depth, digesting and responding to scholarship on their social theories.

Think about how experiences with God might be defined as “intimate.”

Read *Story of Avis* or *A Modern Instance* and compare it to our period.

Read *Benito Cereno* by Herman Melville, a portrait of what really happens when we encounter “the other”