

SOUVENIRS OF AMERICA: AMERICAN GIFT BOOKS, 1825 – 1840

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By

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## Introduction

Beginning in the fall of 1825, American buyers could purchase the perfect gift for Christmas and New Year's celebrations. In that year, Carey and Lea published *The Atlantic Souvenir, A Christmas and New Year's Offering*. This first volume of Carey and Lea's popular annually published gift book was "a little volume of lighter literature, adorned with beautiful specimens of art" and featured "embellishments," "in the most finished style of our native artists" (preface). The volume sold well, establishing *The Atlantic Souvenir* and the American-produced gift book as staples in antebellum culture.

Between 1826 and the Civil War, Americans embraced the gift book genre. During these years, American buyers and readers purchased gift books enthusiastically, representing middle-class Americans' interest in sentiment and culture. The shelves of American bookshops offered titles such as *The Token*, *The Atlantic Souvenir*, *The Talisman*, *The Gift*, and *The Offering* to name just a few. Gift books contained short stories, poems, essays, and images that were usually engravings made from original artworks. Gift books are often known as keepsakes, miscellanies, souvenirs, and are also called annuals because of their yearly publication - one volume would be prepared and published at the end of each year and dated for use during the coming year. I primarily use the term "gift book" because I focus exclusively on book series marketed as holiday gifts. I focus on Samuel G. Goodrich's *The Token* series and on Carey and Lea's *The Atlantic Souvenir* series, both of which marketed their books as Christmas and New Year's gifts. I have chosen these two series of books because they represent the earliest successful American gift books. *The Atlantic Souvenir*, for

example, had a circulation of 10,000 volumes in 1832 (Bushman 284). Because of their popularity and large circulation, these two series were instrumental in creating what would become the conventions of American gift books. Even after the two series merged in 1833, *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir* remained a constant fixture of American literature until Goodrich gave up his editorship in 1841. These two series of books are also of particular interest because of their now-famous contributors. Nathaniel Hawthorne found success writing professionally for Samuel G. Goodrich's *The Token* and Nathaniel Parker Willis began his professional development working for Goodrich's publications and Carey and Lea's *The Atlantic Souvenir* (Baker 28-30). *The Token* additionally features contributions from writers such as Catharine M. Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and H. W. Longfellow. *The Atlantic Souvenir* also featured contributions from Catharine M. Sedgwick along with Lydia M. Child, Washington Irving, and William Cullen Bryant (Thompson 52). Although the popularity of gift books reached a peak between 1848 and 1851 (167), I would like to focus on the books printed between 1825 and 1840. Scholars tend to focus primarily on the years closer to the 1850s, but this focus on the years of highest sales overlooks the years when publishers and readers solidified the conventions of American gift books. Although these earlier gift book volumes have received less attention, these are the volumes that made the gift book an American institution. These volumes so effectively responded to the anxieties, cravings, and social movements of their time, that they set up the success of the later volumes.

The volumes of *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* printed between 1825 and 1840 are of further interest because these were the years that Nathaniel Hawthorne and Nathaniel Parker Willis made their most significant contributions. I plan to give particular attention to

these two writers because their careers mirror the balance of conflicting desires that gift books maintain. Both men craved an opportunity to travel outside of the United States even as they wrote material for the all-American gift books. These men are now well-known travelers who found material outside of the United States while still representing models of American professional authorship. However, at the time they made their major contributions to American gift books, they both partook in the tensions between cultural nationalism and passionate curiosity about the Old World. These men's contribution to the *Token and Atlantic Souvenir* reflect the larger movements and tastes that fueled gift books' popularity. This study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of both American gift books and the writings of Hawthorne and Willis. Many of Hawthorne's gift book contributions were later collected in his own volumes of short stories and have received significant critical attention. Looking at these stories in the context of gift book's complicated balance of American nationalism and interest in European refinement and heritage, however, sheds light on the first experience the American public had with these stories. Willis's gift book contributions have received less critical attention than Hawthorne's have, yet examining his stories, poems, and other material in the context of American gift books adds to the growing discussion of his work and his place in the history of American writing.

As its name suggests, *The Atlantic Souvenir* did not avoid its European heritage. Instead, Carey and Lea created a work that balanced the appeal of a European form with the appeal of exclusively American productions. The introduction to the first *Atlantic Souvenir* proudly assures readers that in this American volume, "every article is the production of our own citizens." Such open pride in American literary and artistic creations marks the particular American character of their book, setting it apart from competing books. Yet the

subject matter that these American writers and artists chose does not always directly reflect this same patriotic focus on everything American. *The Atlantic Souvenir for 1826* included literary contributions like “Paris, from Pere La Chaise,” “Naples,” and “Athens,” along with more traditionally American “The Catholic Iroquois” and “Freedom.” As the titles suggest, the publishers and editor of the volume felt that their readers would appreciate a work produced by Americans but that they would also like to read about scenes set in Europe as well as in the United States. Beginning with Carey and Lea’s first gift book, American gift books worked to balance the contradictory impulses of American nationalism and curiosity about the Old World.

Based on Carey and Lea’s model, gift books claimed the cachet of a European-developed genre, elegantly framing works that laid claim to American writers’ skill in depicting material gathered from around the world. Hawthorne and Willis, for example, explored American’s relationship with Europe in their contributions and yet could also represent the potential of American creativity. *The Atlantic Souvenir’s* careful balance between pride in American skill and interest in America’s ties to Europe proved so appealing to the American public that Carey and Lea’s model became the standard approach for American gift books until the Civil War.

Gift books’ history and the editorial material within the books suggests that the primarily middle-class American readers were eager to buy American books produced exclusively by American printers, writers, and artists. Editors’ advertisements and introductions celebrate qualities such as “native genius” and improvements in the quality of arts and letters in the United States (see *The Atlantic Souvenir for 1828*). Samuel Goodrich, editor of *The Token for 1836*, praised “The rapid advance that has recently been made [in the

United States] in the various arts” in his introduction to the year’s volume. In the early years of gift book history, the books’ popularity continued to grow, suggesting that the appeals to American nationalism were finding an eager audience. The books, however, had to balance Americans’ interest in buying American books with their curiosity about life outside of the United States. Contributions like “Lady Jane Grey,” “On the Portrait of the Marchioness of Carmathaen,” and “The Troubadour” (*Atlantic Souvenir* 1831) might seem out of place in a publication that celebrates itself as a testament to American creativity, but Americans’ desire to read about places outside of the United States does not mean that the individuals were not proud of their American identity and the success of their nation. Instead, Americans were becoming more confident about their identity as citizens of the United States and they were eager to explore their developing country’s relationship with other locations.

In his book, *Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving*, Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky suggests that Americans in Washington Irving’s generation were eager to visit Europe after the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars “to explore the land of their forefathers in order to view for themselves the famous monuments and institutions that had excited their childhood imaginations” (2). For those Americans who were eager to relive the scenes they experienced in their travels abroad and for those who did not have the opportunity for such travel, gift books offered to satiate the cravings for the Europe of the American imagination. Such interest in European places, people, and ideas suggests Americans’ growing confidence in their country’s own cultural legitimacy. Exploring European history and art was simply a way that Americans were exploring their own history and identities.

American gift books contain European images, settings, and themes along with assertions that Americans enjoy a culture that is distinctive yet not inferior to older cultures and traditions. Editorial material in the *Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* often expresses pride in the fertility of Americans' imagination and artistic skill. The books triumphantly claim that every contribution in the book came from the mind of an American. However, even in a publication with contributors who can all be considered Americans, American artists often chose European settings and material. In fact, editors' introductory material sometimes hints that many of the books' American contributors were traveling or living in Europe. As with Hawthorne and Willis, gift books and their contributors were concerned about European cultural education and the validation that successful connections with Europe could provide. While the *Atlantic Souvenir for 1828* celebrated "native genius," gift books acknowledged that American geniuses often need to gather material outside of the United States.

Early gift book editors gave readers a way to look at the books simultaneously as expressions of American skill and as collections of the most aesthetically pleasing material from around the world. Americans took pride in the ability of American publishers to produce elaborately decorative gift books using American contributions and technology (Thompson 4). Because Americans were experiencing a new wave of prosperity during the years that gift books became popular, the newly prosperous middle-class was eager to use and demonstrate their increasing wealth and social polish. Defining ideal refinement, however, proved complicated for middle-class Americans. In colonial America, gentility was a direct outgrowth of British values. Even in the nineteenth century, European behavior and customs gave middle-class Americans the sense of cultural legitimacy, yet European

forms did not always suit American values and ways of life. The earliest American gift books negotiate the tension between middle-class Americans' desire for European inspired refinement and interest in establishing genuinely American forms.

Because of gift books' visible attention to aesthetic appeal, readers often interpreted gift books as expressions of high culture and considered their own interest in such books as a mark of refinement. As Ralph Thompson hints, the connection between the beautiful objects and polished stories and poems was deceptive.<sup>1</sup> As Meredith McGill points out, gift books were mass-produced beauty calculated to appeal to potential buyers; they were not pure "fine art" (31). The mystique of beauty, art, literature, and a beautiful object gave American readers an appealing sense of luxury, culture, and taste, while mass production made the books physically accessible.

Americans' enthusiastic reception of gift books signals the increasing interest in what Richard Bushman terms "vernacular gentility." Bushman explains that between the mid-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century, the American middle class developed codes of "vernacular gentility." These codes were roughly inspired by the behavior and purchasing choices of the wealthy and influential, but middle-class Americans adapted European modes into a form that better conformed to already existing values and goals (xiii). Gift books success grew out of their flexibility and adaptability; they could fulfill the complicated impulses of middle-class Americans' pursuit of vernacular gentility. Gift books' images, poems, essays, and stories gave readers the chance to imagine the lives of the American and European elite of the past and present, inspiring qualities for middle-class imitation while the books themselves were an outward statement of middle-class gentility.

Although gift books may fall short of high art, they served as a venue for popular middle-class “taste,” art, and refinement. McGill suggests that the relationship between texts and images in gift books worked “to overcome the distance between fine art and the middle-class reader” (31). The engravings of original art gave readers the opportunity to own and view images copied from original, and sometimes famous, works of art. The engravings of these artworks made interpretations of high art physically more accessible to middle-class Americans. More importantly, the images’ presentation and existence within the text made them intellectually more accessible. Thomas Baker points out that “high-brow critics” denounced the material in gift books as falling short of artistic merit (29). Emerson and Thoreau, for example, expressed their distaste for the popular genre (Lehuu 77), yet despite some negative critical responses, gift books became what Baker calls “requisite accessories to gentility” (29) and what Lehuu terms “sacred objects in a new domestic religion” (77). Gift books offered American buyers the feeling of aesthetic and moral refinement in a pleasingly accessible form. For middle-class American buyers, gift books represented a way to bring art into their own realm of experience and influence. Combinations of American writings and American engravings of European works of art brought beautiful images to the American home and gave owners a way to appropriate European source material, framing it in American experience.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will trace the history of gift books and explore the complicated balance between conflicting interests that *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* developed. As Isabelle Lehuu points out, owning and displaying a gift book symbolized a moral stance (78). When owners displayed the book for their family and guests, they

intentionally or unintentionally supported the book's claims to American pride, cultural curiosity, sentiment, and a relationship with the giver.

The next chapter explores the material contributed by gift book editors and publishers. Although its presence is not obtrusive, the editorial material frames each volume of *The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir*. Introductions, advertisements, tables of contents, and directions for inquiries all define the volume and present the creators' voices in the book. I will suggest that these introductory passages represent the editors' and publishers' responses to the conflicting desires of the American reading public. In many cases, the editorial apparatus would be the most important text to someone at the point of purchase. Although a buyer's initial reading would probably not extend beyond the introductory material and the table of contents, that introductory material told the buyer what to expect from the book and indicated what type of text the book contained. A buyer could see the titles of contributions such as "Our Village," "The Day Departs," and "The Alps" and note items "by the author of *Twice-Told Tales*" and "by the author of *Hobomok*" (*The Token for 1838; The Atlantic Souvenir for 1827*). Even if buyers purchased the books exclusively as reading material for another person, the editorial contributions defined the books' meaning, shaping the public's understanding of the form.

Gift books provided engaging, often sentimental literary and artistic contributions while also functioning as decorative objects. Buyers would often display gift books in a parlor space tacitly laying claim to a popular form of sentimentality and refinement. Chapter three suggests the importance of the gift book as a display item and inquires into gift books' role in American constructions of gentility. I claim that through the books' attractive

exteriors and literary and artistic contributions, the books invited readers to associate themselves with a middle-class American adaptation of European-inspired refinement.

The life of American gift books introduces multiple layers of meaning created both by the way the text fulfills conflicting desires in readers and, as Meredith McGill suggests, by their existence in a space between “economic and affective systems of exchange” (34). Gift books were mass-produced and fashioned to appeal to as many readers as possible. These mass-produced appeals to beauty, emotion, and relationships, however, became so popular that they became a prominent accessory in the system of American gentility that the books’ editorial material and contributions described.

## **Contradictory Balance: American Nationalism and a Taste for Europe**

Gift books' dramatic popularity during the first half of the nineteenth century demonstrates how attuned the books were with Americans' needs and desires. The books addressed America's identity as a nation during the first half of the nineteenth century by presenting material that explored settings and issues from all over the world almost entirely from an American point of view. American publishers departed only slightly from the forms that European annuals established, yet because *The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir* celebrated American authorship and artistry, the books framed each passage within arguments about the cultural fertility of the United States. Even if a given passage does not explicitly explore American identity or America's relationships with other countries, the work's American authorship and existence within the framework of the book places it within the context and claims of the American gift book. The books' success, however, was also contingent on the way that they addressed readers' personal concerns. Individual Americans were negotiating the tensions between their national allegiance and the country's ties to European heritage. Gift books' focus on relationships, both in their contributions and in their designated function, claims a place within the owner's personal experience, while the attention to refinement offers readers a way to define their positions in class and culture.

Gift books represent just one part of a long tradition of annually published books in Europe and in the United States. Almanacs, for example, had long combined material such as weather forecasts, ruled pages for diary entries, poetry, and miscellaneous information with a calendar for a given year.<sup>2</sup> Literary annuals grew from this traditional form but eliminated the utilitarian elements such as the calendar and spaces for notes, creating a work

focused more on decoration and entertainment than utility. Literary annuals became popular in Europe as early as 1765, but the trend for literary annuals took several decades to reach English publishers. London publisher Rudolph Ackermann adapted the continental genre for his publication *The Forget Me Not for 1823*. Ackermann fashioned his book to serve as a token of affection and remembrance that would be passed from a buyer to a loved one, making his volume officially a gift book as well as a literary annual.

American publishers began compiling literary annuals in 1825, not many years after Ackermann's success with his gift books. In that year, Pennsylvania publisher The Port Folio Office began work on *The Philadelphia Souvenir*, "a collection of fugitive pieces from the Philadelphia press" (Thompson 3, 148). Additionally, A. R. Poole, another Philadelphia publisher, issued *Le Souvenir*, a "picturesque pocket diary for 1826." This volume contained the features of an almanac along with several British-authored literary contributions, making the book as much an almanac as a literary annual (3, 156). Just a few months after publishers began work on *The Philadelphia Souvenir*, Carey and Lea also began work on their *Atlantic Souvenir, A Christmas and New Year's Offering for 1826*. Although Carey and Lea were not the first publishers who adapted the European literary annual for audiences in the United States, their *Atlantic Souvenir* was the first widely circulated and successful American literary annual (Thompson 2-3). More importantly, the volume was the first to imitate Ackermann's focus on the literary annual as a gift of affection, making *The Atlantic Souvenir; A Christmas and New Year's Offering* America's first self-identified annual gift book. Carey and Lea's volume, however, purported to be more than just an imitation of a European form; the publishers cast their publication as a new American innovation on a European form.

Not long after Carey and Lea's initial success with *The Atlantic Souvenir*, American publishers flooded bookshops with other yearly keepsake volumes. Just a year after Carey and Lea presented their volume, Samuel G. Goodrich released his own all-American annual gift book called *The Token*. Goodrich employed his friend and then little-known writer Nathaniel Parker Willis to edit his volume. *The Token* proved as successful as *The Atlantic Souvenir*. When Carey and Lea experienced slacking profits in 1832, they sold their series to Goodrich who merged his new acquisition with his own series forming *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir* (Thompson 51). The Civil War, however, brought a change of taste. Gift books still existed in the United States and abroad, but they did not have the same appeal for American book buyers. Ralph Thompson argues that even in the years leading up to the Civil War, gift books could not fully contain the new anxieties and concerns of the nation. Serious readers, he suggests, were looking for a medium that could take on issues like slavery and temperance, while readers looking for lighter entertainment turned to magazines that offered literary contributions and images at a lower price (5). Daguerreotypes, Isabell Lehuu suggests, replaced gift books as the most popular token of affection (101).

However, earlier in the century, elaborately decorative gift books like *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* represented the latest technology in printing and demonstrated the capabilities of American publishers while appealing to Americans' interest in 'refinement' and 'good taste.' American publishers bound American literary contributions as elaborately as European publishers could bind contributions from European authors. S. G. Goodrich, publisher of *The Token for 1828*, introduced the first volume of his gift book by explaining that his volume was inspired by London annuals. He acknowledges the difficulty of producing a work that equals the quality of the London annuals, but assures his readers "If, in

respect to the embellishments, the Token is found inferior to the English Souvenirs, the Publisher hopes that this disadvantage may be compensated, in some degree, by higher interest in the literary contents of the volume” (iii). The literary contributions in London annuals, he explains, are “light and trifling,” but he hints that the contributions to his own American volume are of far higher quality and substance. He does explain, however, that though the works of art might not be as “exquisite” as the works in the London annuals, “the embellishments relate to American history, scenery, and manners, [and] he trusts that the work may find favor with those, who would encourage every attempt to explore our native mines, and draw from them the treasures of poetry and romance” (iii-iv). Goodrich’s introduction validates the gift book form by appealing to interest in European print culture and art. At the same time, he introduces arguments for the superiority of the American material. His gift book, he suggests, is the best of two worlds. The book is published in an accepted British form and yet integrates material that demonstrates American “treasures of poetry and romance.” Though early American gift book editors like Goodrich included polite apologies, the equality of printing technologies, to a certain extent, legitimated the American literary productions and engravings of art. Combining the borrowed form with the American contributions, American gift books balanced Americans’ desire to support their own artists, writers, and publishers with their interest in the cultural mystique of Europe. Goodrich sets up this balance in his introduction to the first volume of *The Token. The Atlantic Souvenir*, a gift book series that also claimed to present American productions, even uses a name that suggests the exchange of treasures through transatlantic travels. Carey and Lea’s gift book is a keepsake that showcases American skill while producing a decorative object that would appeal to Americans’ craving for European-derived refinement.

In gift books, American artists and writers found inspiration in European works of art, scenes, and culture, but they often discussed these from an American point of view. McGill points out that American painters and engravers favored European material, but that the written material in the books “worked to make European culture safe for Americans” (31). The accessible, American-authored texts gave readers an American’s view of European customs and life. Passages written about European or exotic material from an American point of view could focus on the attractive or intriguing qualities in the material but still support the values that American audiences expected in the gift book form. The travel account “Scenes on the Thames,” for example, describes the English river from a traveling American’s point of view. The writer begins his account of the Thames by comparing it to scenes in the United States.

To him who had been accustomed from infancy to the broad and swelling streams of America, to the roar of lofty cataracts, or the sweeping of majestic torrents, it seemed indeed strange that the boasted river of a nation, should hardly exceed in size, many a stream which flows unnoticed among our valleys.  
(*Atlantic Souvenir for 1827* 293)

While the passage is primarily a reflection on the rich history surrounding the Thames, the writer still chooses to contrast the placid English river with what he sees as the more vigorous, impressive rivers in the United States. The writer boastfully declares that Americans might not even notice the Thames because of their familiarity with more impressive streams, consequently using his praise of the rich history of the Thames to hint that American rivers hold even more promise than the famed British waterway.

The writer fulfills the curiosity of American readers by describing what one might experience as one visited the famous British river, but he also takes advantage of his reflections on the rich heritage of the Thames to claim the best of Britain’s cultural heritage

as a part of Americans' own heritage. He suggests that "All of art and almost all of nature - all of history, of poetry, of wealth, of commerce, and of taste - have combined each to spread over" the Thames (293). The writer makes strong claims for the heritage of the British river, but the force of those claims also extends to the heritage of the United States. The travel account reflects the view that America offers promise but not a rich historical background - a popular view of his time. Hawthorne, for example, expresses this concern about the United States in a now-famous passage in his Preface to *The Marble Faun*: "No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity" (Hawthorne 590). The writer of "Scenes on the Thames," takes a different view of Americans' situation by suggesting that America does not have a deficiency. He agrees that America represents boundless promise, but he also hints that America already has a storied past inherited from Britain. Americans just have to travel across the Atlantic to visit the scenes of their early past, while they can find the scenes of their future promise at home. An American tourist, the passage suggests, can visit the Thames and reflect on the rich history that surrounds the famous river, claiming views of the river and the heritage surrounding it as a means to understand American experience.

Accounts of European life, landscape, and history were common in gift books and appeared consistently for many years. The accounts generally described famous or attractive scenes but often approached those scenes from the American traveler's point of view. As in "Scenes on the Thames," the voice of the American traveler allowed the reader to present scenes of European grandeur while still situating the scenes in American experience. Even when writers did not directly compare European with American scenes, they often spoke

confidently, claiming the right to evaluate the quality of European scenes. In “The Italian Boulevard,” the writer uses the American traveler’s experience to evaluate London and Paris.

An American usually goes to Paris, after having recently left London, and he therefore sees the former place to great advantage. Nothing can be more unlike than these two great capitals. London is dark and dirty, canopied with fogs and swimming in mud [. . .] In Paris it is different [. . .] The characteristic order and politeness of the French are distinctly visible. (*The Token for 1829* 181)

Even if gift book readers have not had the chance to travel abroad, the writer brings the experience to them and tells them what their opinion on the two places should be. An American, the passage suggests, can see the true qualities of the two cities in a way that Europeans cannot see. American travelers’ traditional direction of exploration and their vantage as what the writer calls “strangers” allows them to discern both the inferiority of the London streets and the pleasantness of Parisian manners. The writer gives his American readers his descriptions of two of the most influential cities in the world and claims Americans’ right to evaluate them.

The writer of “The Italian Boulevard” does not celebrate America’s British heritage as the writer of “Scenes from the Thames” does, yet the two writers adopt a similar approach to European scenes. Both travelers write from an American point of view and yet they do not express any hesitation in describing their travels to see European scenes. Rather than celebrating Europe in a way that would suggest the inferiority of American scenes and cities, the two writers approach their travels as confident reviewers. The writers report on European scenes and manners, yet they validate the American readers’ points of view by consistently writing as American travelers. The gift books’ assurances that the literary contributions represent works of American genius brings the European scenes into an American realm of

experience and ownership. European art, manners, and landscape may not belong to Americans, but American genius can interpret European experience. Contributions like “Scenes from the Thames” and “The Italian Boulevard” construct relationships between American readers and European scenes. The writers supply both the scenes and the reflections, making the European material accessible to a middle-class American audience. Having views of European manners, landscape, and art printed in a book that Americans owned and displayed in their homes, brought Europe into Americans’ own space and experience. As McGill’s discussion suggests, however, these views of Europe were in some sense sterilized – made safe and comfortable for American readers. Although the writer of “The Italian Boulevard” speaks of mud and bad manners, he still presents the view of London and Paris from the perspective of a wealthy American traveler. All of the ideas are filtered through the American point of view and are targeted to middle-class interest in the European upper classes. Working people are only included as picturesque peasants, not as representatives of social movements or struggles for subsistence. The relationships that gift books claim with Europe focus on art, history, “taste,” manners, and, to a certain extent, commerce. Writers of the travel accounts, poems, and stories claimed European inspiration, but presented the material in a way that would be accessible and appealing to American audiences.

While travel accounts from the point of view of American tourists remained popular, gift book contributors also reflected on life and history in the United States. Like travel accounts written from the point of view of American tourists, these stories invite American readers to consider experiences outside of their own. Hawthorne challenges readers to examine their relationship with America’s past and older American relationships with

Europe. “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” appeared in *The Token for 1836* and explored an incident in early American history. The account presents a clash between the strict American Puritans of New England and the more frivolous European settlement at Merry Mount. Hawthorne sets up the tension between the two groups in his prefatory comments, explaining that an account of the event can be found in “the grave pages of our New England analysts,” but that a discussion of the Merry Mount community’s “masques, mummeries, and festive customs” can be found in “Strutt’s Book of English Sports and Pastimes” (*Tales* 88). The Puritans’ version of history, Hawthorne notes, exists in the recorded past of the United States, but the history of the Merry Mount customs can only be found in an English book. Festive celebrations find no place in the “grave pages” of history that American Puritans left to future generations. Hawthorne’s story subtly resists the oppression of such a grave heritage. He does, after all, write a new history including both the severe Puritans’ stances and the Merry Mount residents’ dedication to mirth and beauty.

Hawthorne’s story invites readers to explore the tensions of America’s heritage and, perhaps, to reconsider American identity based on Hawthorne’s reworking of the historical event. Rather than entirely siding with either group, Hawthorne depicts the weaknesses of both communities. The residents of Merry Mount, the story explains, “imagined a wild philosophy of pleasure, and came [to the American colonies] to act out their latest day-dream” (92). Empty gaiety rules the Merry Mount of Hawthorne’s sketch, keeping residents from discovering the genuine pleasures and truths of life. In Merry Mount, “The young deemed themselves happy. The elder spirits, if they knew that mirth was but the counterfeit of happiness, yet followed the false shadow willfully” (92). The strict, unfeeling Puritans, however, do not offer a desirable remedy for this empty life. While the triflers of Merry

Mount are “striving to communicate their mirth to the grave Indian,” in the nearby Puritan community, “weapons were always at hand, to shoot down the straggling savage. When they met in conclave, it was never to keep up the old English mirth, but to hear sermons three hours long, or to proclaim bounties on the heads of wolves and the scalps of Indians” (93). The Puritans of “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” lead a life of devotion, but their blood-thirsty relationship with other communities and animals suggests that their strict devotion is empty in the same way the joys of Merry Mount lack true substance. Hawthorne’s approach to these two groups suggests a more complicated relationship between American Puritanism and America’s less severe European heritage than either the Puritan histories or European books of games might depict. Neither community achieves a successful American ideology that can inspire future generations of Americans.

The Puritans are successful in purging the area of European-inspired celebration and vanity, consequently shaping the direction of the region’s history. Hawthorne’s treatment suggests, however, the bitterness of loss and, consequently, calls the heritage of American morality into question. Although the Puritans arrive in Merry Mount to end the May celebration and destroy the community, the forceful Puritan leader Endicott finishes the wedding ceremony of the Lord and Lady of May. The story suggests that for the newly married couple, this “was a deed of prophecy. As the moral gloom of the world overpowers all systematic gaiety, even so was their home of mirth made desolate amid the sad forest” (96-97). Instead of living in the community of false celebration and continual empty joy, the young couple joins the Puritan community and begins traveling “the difficult path which it was their lot to tread” (97). The loss of community, celebration, and beauty is even more poignant in the context of the gift books where the story appeared. Because gift books were

highly decorative and designed as holiday gifts, they participated in some of the behaviors that the story's Puritans condemn. A home "made desolate," "sad," and mirthless opposes the goals of refinement, enjoyment, and American pride that the books promoted.

Hawthorne's story does not favor the vanity of European-inspired "systematic gaiety" either, but hints that Americans of the past hastily rejected qualities that would have given their community balance. By guiding gift book readers in an examination of America's past, Hawthorne encourages readers to reevaluate Americans' relationship with their own history and their country's relationships with European traditions. New England values, the story suggests, are morally sound and are strong enough to successfully defeat the emptiness of European vanity. However, the story recommends tempering those values with the positive qualities of America's European heritage. Ceremony and joy, Hawthorne suggests, are not out of place in American life and, in fact, could make Americans' "difficult path" more smooth.

In "The May-Pole of Merry Mount," Hawthorne presents a historically inspired scene in order to explore the history passed on to Americans by New England Puritans. His reworking of this event from the "grave pages" of American history suggests that readers should reevaluate New England's Puritan heritage and the way such a grave heritage influences the country's character. While Hawthorne does not reject the colonists' independence from the problems in European tradition, he suggests that the Puritans' rejection of European cultural heritage might have been overly harsh. In that way, the story contributes to a re-negotiation of America's relationship with European tradition. While "systematic gaiety" is not desirable, Hawthorne's depiction of the Puritans' cruelty challenges readers to integrate the "old English mirth" into their lives and value systems.

As a part of an American gift book, Hawthorne's exploration of American heritage and of Americans' stances on European tradition takes on even more significance. Hawthorne was, of course, an American author making his exploration of America's colonial past from an antebellum American point of view. Hawthorne invites his readers to join him in looking to the past from this stance and enjoy the lushly described summer celebration of Merry Mount. Participants dance in fanciful costumes around a richly adorned May pole and celebrate the youthful beauty of the couple who is to be married. The images of flowers, spring, celebration, and beauty all appear as consistent tropes of the gift book form, but these are also the elements that Hawthorne's American Puritans find so offensive in the Merry Mount festival. In this context, the story further recommends the importance of celebration, joy, and beauty in American life.

Hawthorne's "The May Pole of Merry Mount" explores early tensions between Americans' views on character, values, and behavior. Through such contributions, American gift books like *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* explore the state of American values during the present time. Like Hawthorne's story, the books offered depictions of European scenes and European-inspired behavior, while still highlighting an almost exclusively American point of view. The books' balance between these seemingly contradictory impulses appealed to interests that already existed in the American public and consequently, American gift books found a receptive audience. The relationship between the books' claims with each individual contribution, however, further fueled the impulses that had already developed in the American middle class. Passages like "Scenes on the Thames," "The Italian Boulevard," and "The May Pole of Merry Mount" respond to Americans' interests while recommending specific values and points of view.

## Editing American Character: Introductory Material

*The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* declare themselves to be gifts for Christmas and New Year's. While a gift book could have been purchased for any reason, their traditional use suggests that the buyer would not have been the reader of the book. Consequently, the editorial material that frames the contributions are crucial in understanding the books' life. Editors and publishers defined their books in the introductory comments, appealing to the impulses of both buyers and readers. These introductory remarks were followed by detailed tables of contents to give buyers a sense of what the book contained. The table of contents for *Token and Atlantic Souvenir for 1836*, for example, begins with "To \*\*\*\*\*," "New Years Day" by Miss Sedgwick, "Anna's Picture" by Florence, "The Fair Pilgrim," by William L. Stone, and "Spring" by J.G. Percival. The selections suggest an attention to Americans' interest in accessible "refinement" and "taste," while promising material appropriate to the women who would usually receive the book as a gift. Often, the tables of contents give not the authors name, but list the contribution as "by the author of" another work. In this way, the books capitalized on the popularity of author's other works. Even if buyers and readers were not familiar with the other work, the table of contents gave them the impression that the author's other work had been successful.

The British gift book *The Keepsake*, Anne Renier suggests, intentionally removed authors' names from their contributions in order to let the passages rest on their own merits. Editors and publishers hoped that their choice would involve readers more deeply in the book as they tried to guess who wrote each contribution. Readers did not, however, find the process engaging and the editors gave up the practice after only a year. In the following

volumes of the *Keepsake*, editors focused on the fame of the contributors, soliciting contributions from popular British writers such as Southey and Scott (8). Although the failed experiment took place in England, the results of *The Keepsake's* editorial move suggests the importance of recognizable name in gift book tables of contents. American changes in the tables of contents in American gift books suggest the same importance of author names. The first volume of *The Token*, released for 1828 did not include authors' names in the table of contents. In this volume, some authors included their names at the end of each contribution, but many other passages remain anonymously authored. Starting with *The Token for 1829*, however, every volume of Samuel Goodrich's *The Token* includes some type of attribution for the majority of the literary and artistic contributions. Similarly, *The Atlantic Souvenir's* first volume prepared in 1825 for 1826 did not include authorial attributions in the table of contents, although many of contributions listed a name or initials at the end of the passage. After their first volume, Carey and Lea began including the names of the authors in the list of contributions and retained the authors' attributions at the end or beginning of each work.

The way the gift books attribute the contributions very widely reflecting both the authors' self-chosen title and the editors' efforts to signal the popularity of the included authors. Lydia Maria Child was consistently called "the author of Hobomok" over the many years that she contributed to *The Atlantic Souvenir*, but Catherine Maria Sedgwick was known as "Miss Sedgwick" in *The Token* and as "the author of 'Hope Leslie'" or "the author of 'Redwood'" in *The Atlantic Souvenir*. Nathaniel Parker Willis wrote primarily as "Roy" in 1827 when he contributed to *The Atlantic Souvenir for 1828* and his entries "The Vacations" and "The Vigil" are both signed by that name at the end of each passage. Carey and Lea's table of contents, however, lists him by name, attributing the contributions to "N. P. Willis."

In 1828, when he contributed several works to *The Token for 1829* (a volume that he also edited), Willis began calling himself N. P. Willis and continued to do so in all of his contributions to *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token*.

Unlike Sedgwick and Willis, Nathaniel Hawthorne's name rarely appears with his contributions. Hawthorne's works are generally attributed "to the author of" one of his other short stories. For example, he often appears as "the Author of 'Twice-Told Tales,'" "The Author of 'Sights from a Steeple,'" and "the Author of 'The Gentle Boy.'" He is even acknowledged by the titles of different stories for contributions appearing in the same volume. In *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir for 1838*, for example, "Peter Goldthwait's Treasure - by the Author of 'Twice-told Tales'" while "Endicott and the Red Cross," also a story from *Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales*, has no attributions in the table of contents or at the end of the passage. *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir for 1833* contains both "The Seven Vagabonds - By the Author of 'The Gentle Boy'" and "Sir William Pepperell - by the author of 'Sights from a Steeple,'" two stories that Hawthorne revised for his *Twice-Told Tales*. In the text of the volume "The Seven Vagabonds" is attributed the same way as it is in the table of contents. "Sir William Pepperell," however, is signed "H\*\*\*\*\*" at the end of the story.

Gift book editors and publishers were central in crafting the meanings of the genre, but the duties of position varied with each publication. The publishers of *The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir* employed editors to gather and organize contributions to the books, but the editor was much more central to the preparation of *The Token* than of *The Atlantic Souvenir*. *The Token*, though published by several different publishers, had only two different editors between 1827 and 1840. Samuel Goodrich, who had previously written popular children's books under the name Peter Parley, published and edited the first volume of *The Token* with

the assistance of Nathaniel Parker Willis. Although Goodrich published only the first two volumes of *The Token*, he served as the full editor or co-editor with N. P. Willis on all but one volume. In 1828, Willis independently edited the second volume of the book for Goodrich as publisher (Thompson 158).

Each volume of *The Token* lists the name of the editor on the title page along with the names of the publishers displaying the important role the editor played in organizing and preparing the volume. Volumes of *The Atlantic Souvenir* do not list the name of the editor on the title page with the name of the publishers, suggesting that, for *The Atlantic Souvenir*, the editor was of less importance than the publishers. When Philadelphia publishers Henry C. Carey and Isaac Lea decided to adapt the European annual for American book buyers, they hired Henry D. Gilpin as the editor. Though Gilpin later served as the Attorney General and edited the *Biography of the Signers to the Declaration of Independence*, he was principally only the titular editor of *The Atlantic Souvenir*. Gilpin, then only 24, served as the editor, but Carey and Lea still controlled the decisions about the book (Thompson 49). Willis was 22 when he began editing publications for Goodrich, even younger than Carey and Lea's Gilpin (Baker). Willis's age did not hinder Goodrich from giving Willis some of the editorial control that Carey and Lea denied Gilpin. Each year, *The Token* directed inquiries to the editor, in some cases in care of the publishers while *The Atlantic Souvenir* consistently referred only to the publishers in their discussions of business transactions. The different roles of the editors in each publication is reflected in the editors' remuneration as well. Gilpin was only paid \$100 for his work on the first volume of the book while *The Token's* N. P. Willis received \$200 for his work for S.G. Goodrich's publications in 1829 (Thompson 50, 65). Regardless of who had the most control, the editors' and publishers' contributions to

gift books were central in shaping the nature of the books. Beyond soliciting and reviewing contributions, editors, along with their publishers, developed the material that would introduce gift books to buyers who might not necessarily read beyond the introductory information.

Each volume of *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* begins with introductory material from the publishers or the editor. The books use different titles for these passages from volume to volume. Sometimes the passage is called the preface, introduction, or advertisement. Regardless of the title, the contents of the passage remained similar from year to year. The editor or publisher addresses the “public,” thanking consumers for their patronage and apologizing that some contributions could not be included for various reasons. The introductory material usually comments on the contributions and discusses the relationships the contributions have to the United States. The prefatory passages are crucially important in understanding each individual gift book and the form as a whole because the passages are the only place in the book where the editor actually speaks to the readers. In these passages, editors introduce their own interpretation of the volume and comment on what they imagine are the readers’ desires. The editors’ explanations tell readers how to interpret the volume and suggest how the editors and publishers viewed their book.

The occasional title “advertisement” is revealing. This section gave potential buyers a sense of what the book contained, how it was to be used, and how the book might be superior to other books on the market. The advertisement page for *The Atlantic Souvenir 1831* assures readers that “No pains have been spared to make [the book], in all respects, a work worthy of the present state of taste, literature, and art” and *The Atlantic Souvenir 1832*

declares that the publishers are committed to making “an unabated effort to increase [*The Atlantic Souvenir*’s] claims to approbation, by increasing its excellence as a work of taste, literature and art.” Although these volumes existed in an already successful and recognizable series, the writer assures the reader that this is a work of “taste.” The writers explain what they would like the reader to think of the publication by giving these definitions. For middle-class Americans eager to assert their claim to taste, these simple definitions would address not only the potential buyers’ desires but also their concerns about the book. Like these volumes of *The Atlantic Souvenir*, gift books hinted that buyers could purchase and then display taste. Attention to the relationships between European art and the productions of the United States in editors’ introductions suggests that Americans were eager to prove that people of their own country could produce and identify worthy creative works. Taste had been extensively debated in eighteenth-century Europe, so it is not surprising that Americans embraced the concept of a quality of mind that could be trained to judge aesthetic merit<sup>3</sup>. However, the concept moved from the discourse of philosophy into the popular consciousness becoming a marker of aesthetic sensitivity and training that was often linked with social advantage. In popular usage, taste could be used to indicate something about one’s mind, but also began to suggest social worthiness. Members of the growing American middle class would have been familiar with the popular uses of “taste,” and like people in Europe, wanted to be perceived as having the most appropriate standard. As gift books indicate, Americans were particularly interested cultivating good taste to prove that the quality could exist in the United States.

*The Atlantic Souvenir* 1826 described itself as containing “light literature” but by the 1832 volume, the editor uses only “literature,” suggesting that readers did not want to be

perceived as reading “light literature.” The style and length of the contributions to the volumes did not change, but even the slight change to the editor’s definition of the volume is telling. The change suggests that readers enjoyed the short, generally sentimental literary contributions but they did not want to think of this writing as “light.”

*The Token’s* Samuel Goodrich approaches the problem of defining the material in the book while still rendering it appealing to the aspiring middle class audience. He suggests that the English annuals are “light and trifling” in what he calls “the literary department” (*The Token for 1828*). Goodrich admits that he modeled his annual on the souvenirs produced in London, but he also argues that the literary contributions are of “higher interest” than the material in English annuals (iii). Goodrich’s strategy gives him the chance to explain the first volume of his book to readers while still appealing to their interests. The editor uses his discussion of London annuals to define what gift books are, but he uses his discussion of his own book to suggest what American annuals can mean to the United States. *The Token*, Goodrich’s discussion hints, will display Americans’ interest in a literature that is more worthy of attention than the “light and trifling” material that English readers have come to expect. For an individual wishing to appear cultured, a work of “taste” and “refinement” would be particularly attractive (Thompson 4). Consequently, gift book editors began describing the books’ contributions in a way that would appeal to potential readers’ desires about who they would like to be, not just what they would like to read.

As was conventional, *The Atlantic Souvenir for 1830* thanks “the public” for their “liberal patronage” (v). This thanks, though used to praise the volume by celebrating the taste of the buyers, also sets up a flattering position for those who choose to buy *The Atlantic Souvenir*. The editor casts buyers as patrons who are liberally supporting worthy exertions

in the art and literature of their country. The passage continues, explaining “Much of the literary portion of the work has been supplied by writers already honourably and advantageously known; and it is hoped and believed that all of it will do credit to the genius and talent of the country, which the publishers can truly say it has been their earnest desire to promote” (v). The writer is inviting the reader into this world of genius and talent, awarding the buyer the place that an aristocrat might have held in the Europe of the past – patron to the most honored artists of a country. Gift books combined the language of patronage and gratitude for support, letting buyers and readers enter a world of antiquated European influence. The introduction subtly establishes the setting for the values and scenes that many of the literary contributions in the books describe. Carey and Lea’s passage is unique in the particular choice of language, but the values that the passage promotes appear in many American gift book introductions.

Goodrich also uses the language of patronage to appeal to potential buyers’ complicated impulses. In *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir for 1834*, the editor suggests that preparing a gift book “is attended with a degree of hazard and responsibility, which nothing but the most liberal patronage on the part of the public could compensate.” Goodrich apparently expected to receive this patronage; he declares “so long as Providence gives us the strength, and the public bestow upon us their encouragement, we propose to continue our labors.” Appealing to the readers as potential patrons of the arts, Goodrich compares the choices of consumers with the will of God. He casts potential buyers not as consumers choosing between goods but instead as noble individuals who have the power of taste as well as money. By choosing to purchase *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir for 1834*, readers can perform the commendable acts of giving the publishers, editor, and contributors “strength”

and encouraging wholesome “labor.” For readers, particularly of the aspiring middle-class, this subtle positioning would seem seductively attractive. Not only do the buyers have the power to purchase works of talent and genius, they can use their taste and money to encourage artists from the United States in pursuits that are both moral and beneficial to the country.

As the editors crafted introductory material to appeal to various American buyers, they carefully connected readers’ desires to display their good taste, Americans’ pride in their country, and middle-class buyers’ preference for what would have been called “light literature” a few years before. Although in reality, the practices of patronage and gathering influential subscribers for books had long been out of use, using language that called up the older systems allowed editors to flatteringly draw readers into imagined relationships with the texts. Each reader individually was doing little to encourage the advancement of art and literature in the United States, but editors described more direct relationships between individual readers and concerns about American cultural development. In the language of gift book editors’ introductions, each individual buyer plays a part in facilitating the work of native geniuses – the realities of the market, the publishing process, and the actual creative works in the books are largely ignored during editors’ discussion of the power of patronage. Editors promised their American readers the pleasure of an anachronistic, traditionally European system of publishing by alluding to an ideological system of public patronage. The public patronage that gift book editors discuss allows them to draw readers into a fantasy of traditionally understood personal influence while offering the opportunity to be a member of a group – the influential American public.

Both *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* celebrate their dedication to publishing American literary contributions and printing American engravings of art. The editors of these volumes, however, do not discuss another significant point – the books were published in the United States. Even the straightforward copyright and publisher information printed in the front of the book was significant to the life of the American gift book because the information marked the books as truly American. Whether or not owners consciously supported the books' claims for the worthiness of American art and the proliferation of "native genius" in the United States, they were supporting those ideas by placing the books on display in their homes. Not only did the act of displaying the books suggest support for what the books claimed to stand for, simply buying or owning an American gift book was linked with pride in American productions.

Even with a mix of American, European, and more exotic material, the editors claim their books as examples of American genius. Editors use their introductions to subtly explain how all of this material can exist together in the same book, reconciling the mixed preferences in the audience. Although the subjects that the authors and artists chose are not solely American, the editors often explain that almost all of the contributors can be considered Americans. The editor of *The Token 1836* explains that the publishers have decided to include only American contributions because of "the interest manifested by the community in the productions of our countrymen." The editor apologizes, however, because making the book entirely American was challenging:

In accomplishing his design, the publisher has encountered difficulties which the public can in part appreciate. [. . .] Of the thousands of fine pictures painted every year in Europe, there are probably not a dozen that would prove decidedly popular in a work of this kind. In this country the artists being few, and restricting ourselves to the productions of American painters, it

is plain that our choice is confined within very narrow limits. We have in the present volume used our best endeavors, yet as it must come into comparison with those of England, where selections may be made, alike from the numerous productions of living artists, and the exhaustless treasure of the past, accumulated in the halls, castles, palaces and galleries throughout Europe, it might be wise to bespeak some favor in behalf of our work on the ground of its American character.  
*(The Token and Atlantic Souvenir for 1836)*

Even while declaring the goal of including only American productions, the editor hints at readers' interest in Europe. Phrases like "exhaustless treasure of the past" and "halls, castles, palaces and galleries" call up the images that Americans might associate with Europe. In fact, the volume does include such images in its contributions even though those contributions were made by American writers and artists. Yet the editor's apologies cause the reader to do just what the writer is asking him or her not to do – compare American art and European art. The editor proposes "American character" as a quality that negates any potential inferiority of productions from the United States in comparison with European productions. In the view that Goodrich presents to his potential readers and buyers, Europe may still have a longer artistic tradition, but American character can make American productions the near equals of European material. Goodrich does not reject Europe's artistic heritage and the United States' relationship to that heritage nor does he suggest that the American material is unworthy of attention. Goodrich simply proposes that Europe has the advantage in quantity of art, meaning that they necessarily have more quality art because their collections are so vast. The editor's reference to American character, however, suggests an alternative measure of artistic quality. Americans should look on *The Token* with "favor," the introduction suggests, because the material in the book has some relationship to their life and experiences as Americans. The book may contain inspirations from European customs

and scenes but the views are American interpretations of that European material – giving the book “American character.” The introduction balances its attention to a European heritage and praise of American productions. Goodrich asks for readers’ patience for American material but proposes a measure of art that could remove any inequalities between European art and American art, reconciling the contradictory impulses that America gift books contain.

## Displaying Sentiment, Purchasing Gentility

*The Atlantic Souvenir for 1831* begins with the poem “Remember Me” by Prosper M. Wetmore. The poem’s speaker explains that he is not bringing coral or gems to adorn the receiver. Instead, he explains “A gift more precious far is mine / Than sparkling gem from earth or sea, / This treasury of thought – ‘tis thine - / The boon it asks – Remember me!” (13). As was traditional in gift books, the introductory poem establishes the affective tone for the rest of the contributions and suggests the significance of gift giving. Most volumes of *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* begin with a poem that refers to sentiment, gift-giving, and affection. Two successive volumes of *The Atlantic Souvenir* begin with a poem entitled “Forget Me Not,”<sup>4</sup> while several volumes of *The Token* begin with a poem entitled “To” that describes the dedication of a gift, typically hinting at a female receiver<sup>5</sup>. Introductory poems, like Wetmore’s “Remember Me,” dedicate the contents of the book to the receiver and praise the giver’s choice of gift. *The Atlantic Souvenir*, Wetmore’s poem hints, is not simply an object of beauty, it also houses enriching material that will adorn the mind in a way that is more lasting than fleeting external beauty. Yet American gift books could not entirely condemn decorative objects; publishers crafted the books to serve as decorative physical memorials to affection. Although many introductory poems praise the purity of feeling and the incomparable worth of literature that exercises the mind and emotions, these poems often accompany an introductory image. Their relationship to this image ties them to the books’ decorative functions even while they praise the purity in the gift of literature. Some poems even had editorial notes to point out the connections between the poem and the introductory image. *The Token for 1830*, for example, presents the poem’s title, “The Token,” and then notes in all capital letters “REFERRING TO THE VIGNETTE TITLEPAGE” (13).

Publishers developed gift books to be read, but they were also crafted as objects for visual enjoyment. On a parlor table or bookshelf, the highly embellished books displayed the values of the literature within. The text of the books celebrated affection, sentiment, and relationships, making the display of the books a symbolic monument to these values and to the specific relationship between the receiver and the giver.

Using gift books as a monument to emotion and to a select relationship was not specifically American. Ackermann's first London annual, *The Forget Me Not for 1823* established gift books' complicated relationships between affection, emotion, and display. For Americans, however, gift books' symbolic functions and value systems were instrumental to their phenomenal success. For Americans, displaying American-published gift books like *The Atlantic Souvenir* or *The Token* reinforced buyers' support for American products while also claiming an association with a type of refinement imported from Europe.

Richard Bushman has pointed out that American sentimental fiction transformed European gentility – aristocratically inspired behavior for ballrooms and salons – into a system of genteel behavior for American private homes. Works of fiction, he suggests, could reconcile Americans' anxieties about their democratic values with their desire to participate in a heritage of European refinement (281). *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* offered readers short fiction, poetry, essays, and images that celebrated Americans' ability to create and appreciate material inspired by a diversity of cultures and locations all over the world while still celebrating their pride in American values. American gift books presented figures like N. P. Willis's "Genevieve" who he depicts as "like / The Hebe of an Oriental dream" (*The Token for 1830* 319) and his "bewitchingly proud" New England villager Alice Blair from "The Ruse" (*The Token for 1829* 155), but reconciled such differing images. Gift

books promised the refinement and enlightened entertainment of the world in a form that suited middle-class Americans' ways of life.

Prosper M. Wetmore's poetic speaker explains that he is not bringing gifts of jewels, but instead a book. The speaker argues that his gift, a "treasury of thought," is much more meaningful than a gift that has beauty but no substance. His gift also has the benefit of being polite and appropriate for a young woman, whereas a gift of jewels would have been forbidden as a love token between a young man and woman. As Isabell Lehuu has observed, books were a particularly attractive choice for a present during courtship because codes of behavior were strict about what types of gifts a man might give to the woman that he was courting (80-84). Items used to adorn the woman's person were forbidden gifts, but books were desirable because they could potentially be morally instructive as well as pleasing. In the case of gift books, a printed text could even be decorative. Naturally, a gift book's associations with sentiment would have made them an appealing choice for a courtship gift from a man to a woman. In fact, gift books' attention to affection, moral reflection, and beauty marked them as a largely feminine form (Thompson 4-5). Yet even with their suitability for courtship, gift books remain with inscriptions denoting many different kinds of relationships. Gift books bear the markings of married pairs, relatives, and friends both male and female. For these individuals, gift books provided a material token of affection – a way to celebrate a relationship and then display that relationship on a bookshelf or parlor table.

A gift book reader might experience the book's text as an individual – reading silently and internally reflecting on the passages - yet the decorative nature of the books and their function as a gift between people place them outside the realm of the purely personal. The text and function of American gift books highlights individual emotional education, but this

internal experience grows from the gift books' mass-produced celebration of ties between people. A gift book serves as personal reading material, but it also is an object whose physical beauty and text recommends sharing with others.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Man of Adamant" from *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir for 1837* vividly reinforces gift books function as a material celebration of relationships. The story suggests that sharing a text can bring people together, but refusing to display one's reflection on a text actually destroys spiritual, emotional, and physical health. Hawthorne's Richard Digby, once a religious pilgrim to the American colonies, becomes so involved in his personal relationship to religion, that he rejects all relationships with human beings. Digby scornfully withdraws from his community to live in a remote cave. He celebrates his solitude: "Here my soul will be at peace; for the wicked will not find me, Here I can read the Scriptures, and be no more provoked with lying interpretations. Here I can offer up acceptable prayers, because my voice will not be mingled with the sinful supplications of the multitude" (Tales 108). For Digby, all communications with other humans represents a distraction from his focus on the Biblical text of his religion. Hawthorne's treatment of the hateful hermit, however, suggests that the qualities that Digby hates about his community are actually the elements that provide emotional and spiritual strength.

The story suggests that text, like life, must be shared with other people. Digby dedicates his time to reading scripture and reflecting on its importance. Unfortunately, his reflections are corrupted by his contempt for human community and his solitary lifestyle. Digby "sat in the portal of his mansion, reading the Bible aloud, because no other ear could profit by it, and reading it amiss, because the rays of the setting sun did not penetrate the

dismal depth of shadow round about him, nor fall upon the sacred page” (109). Living outside of the community, Digby cannot benefit from the literal and symbolic light that life with other people could provide. Hawthorne’s story suggests that for any personal reading to be profitable, the individual’s spiritual and emotional growth must also enrich others.

Sharing text with other “ears” moves the text out of the shadows and into a proper light.

After several days of cave living, an angelically beautiful woman visits Digby in his solitude and describes the importance of sharing life with other people. The woman, a sweet memory from Digby’s life before he left England, encourages the solitary man to rejoin his fellow human beings. The haunting woman, Mary Goffe, urges “come back to thy fellow-men; for they need thee, Richard, and thou hast tenfold need of them” (110). Any further isolation, the woman warns, will result in certain death. Digby’s only hope lies in sharing his reflection with others. Mary begs “make room for me by thy side, and let us read together one page of that blessed volume” (111). Digby rejects the woman’s offer of spiritual companionship and, consequently, dies instantaneously.

Digby feared the many interpretations of scripture that he detected in his community and thus rejected his place in the “multitude,” yet these are precisely the qualities that Hawthorne’s story and gift books encourage. Hawthorne’s story does not specify whether the haunting Mary Goffe was a ghost, angel, or a vision produced in Digby’s haunted mind; the story invites different interpretations. By developing their own interpretation of the mysterious woman, readers must participate in the behaviors that Richard Digby condemns, which reinforces the faultiness of Digby’s convictions. Because the story appears in a book that was designed to be given as a gift of affection, the reader would already have been invited to celebrate the beauty of emotional attachment between two or more people.

Hawthorne's story offers a vivid vindication for the readers' relationship with the gift book and encourages readers to display that relationship for the benefit of those around them.

In the early nineteenth century, readers had begun to believe that knowledge could grow from reflection on a text (Zboray 122 - 133). "The Man of Adamant" qualifies that conviction, suggesting that emotional and intellectual knowledge is only meaningful when applied to relationships with other people. Hawthorne's Richard Digby carefully studies the text of the Bible, but cannot truly understand the writings because he does not share them with a community. The vision of Mary Goffe understands scripture more fully because she has applied it to life and is willing to display it for others. Gift books, while not claiming the spiritual significance of the Bible, encourage readers to display the book for others.

Hawthorne's tale reinforces the importance of this display. In the value system of the story, readers can only discover the true meanings of a text and of themselves if their reflection on that text benefits a community.

At the same time that gift books were gaining widespread popularity, Americans were quickly adopting the culture of the parlor. This parlor space would be a place for families to display their best furniture, their best manners, and share polite conversation. Such a space was the ideal location for gift books and the relationships that they celebrated. As Americans became more prosperous, they began to refashion their houses to reflect the organization and style of European manor houses. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, more and more families removed functional fixtures like beds and fiber working materials from the best room in the house and dedicated the space specifically to hosting guests and to activities of the mind such as reading, letter writing, and decorative sewing (Bushman 256). Richard Bushman describes these changes in *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* and

claims that the development of the parlor signals Americans' eagerness to adopt genteel modes of behavior inspired by late eighteenth-century Europe. Americans wanted to show themselves and their neighbors that they "could appear as polished beings capable of grace, dignity, and propriety" (251-252). The parlor celebrated a European ideal leisure while the success of the American middle-class had been founded on respect for hard work – a value that did not fit well in the parlor where all work was to be kept out of sight. (264-265). Despite these problems, the culture of the American parlor continued to grow until the 1850s (271). The parlor, like the gift book, offered Americans a way to advertise their own interest in European-inspired refinement and culture, while still adapting customs of gentility to their own values.

Even early gift book contributions reflect interest in America's growing parlor culture. In "The Ruse," N. P. Willis glorifies the elegance and refinement of well-bred Americans (*The Token for 1829*). Willis's hero, a university student of elegant background and unimpeachable moral character, takes on the humble position of tutor hoping to capture the attentions of a proud New England woman. The woman, Alice Blair, lives with her father in a remote New England village, but Willis is careful to show the family's dedication to education, polish, and genteel behavior. Willis introduces his hero, Philip Blondel, into the Blair household in a parlor scene. The simple scene presents the family sitting quietly, attempting to make polite conversation while a "city-bred" guest plays with a spaniel (156-157). Willis's Mr. Blair "was struck, at the first interview, with Philip's superiority and gentlemanly address, and, being a man of literary habits, he found the pleasure of his society growing daily" (157). In Willis's view of American life, even a man living in a retired New England village can identify and appreciate a man of Blondel's elegance and refinement after

a single evening of conversation. Although Mr. Blair lives isolated from the currents of fashion and refinement, he hosts his guests in a space dedicated to conversation and genteel society. The New England villager's "literary habits" sufficiently polish him so that he can identify Blondel's superior refinement, which was not surprising in a man who has employed a tutor to teach his daughter classical poetry and foreign languages.

Willis had graduated from Yale University only a year before the fall of 1828 when he contributed "The Ruse" to *The Token for 1829*, a volume which he also edited.<sup>6</sup> A young New Englander striving for polish and refinement himself, his protagonist demonstrates Willis's intimate view of young American culture and ambitions. The story, narrated by Blondel's university classmate, aptly depicts the values of Willis's own generation. Although the story is a humorous account of a young man's romantic adventure, Willis's discussion of Blondel's character lays out the qualities of his ideal American gentleman. Willis's gentleman combines good looks with wide-ranging knowledge and social skill. The narrator explains that for Blondel, refined conversation "was perfectly natural and spontaneous, and the thoughts sprung in his well ordered mind with a harmony and proportion which every one felt" (152). Yet Willis's hero combines this European-inspired polish with humility and strict morals. The narrator explains, "there is now and then a rare instance [. . .] where the character is so crowded with virtues that there is no mark for hatred, and where superiority is borne so unassumingly, that, while you remember it, you forget that you are inferior" (151). Willis's gentleman is superior to the less polished and refined around him, but does not assert this superiority. This American gentleman is refined, educated, and cultured, yet he combines these qualities with strict virtue and respect for others. Philip Bondel could mingle comfortably anywhere in the world, yet he treats

villagers with the same respect that he offers his university classmates. Although Blondel's "ruse" could be perceived as an act of dishonesty, Willis's narrator assures the reader that Blondel's act grows out of genuine love and humility. An American gentleman is educated, polished, and refined, but he is also willing to labor for what he believes in.

Although the parlor itself was to a large extent decorative rather than functional, its presence in middle-class homes reminded families and their guests that they valued the work that made the parlor financially possible and that they endorsed the specialized work that was to take place there. The early nineteenth-century parlor was a space dedicated to the work of the mind through conversation, reading, and reflection on beautiful objects (Bushman 256). Gift books often occupied this space both as reading material and as decoration. Their location in the parlor – a space where the furnishings might be rarely used – reinforces the claims that editors and publishers like Willis, Goodrich, Carey, and Lea make in their discussion of their own books. The reading in *The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* was not functional reading. It instructed the morals and heart rather than teaching practical lessons. Whether a family had the resources to spend time on leisure activities, owning gift books created the appearance that a family was prosperous enough for members, particularly the female family members, to refine their taste and sensibilities rather than engaging in 'productive' labor. Gift book contributions demonstrate that family members are interested in the beautiful and the morally enriching. In a practical way, the parlor would be the cleanest room in a house and would be the most beneficial space for preserving a middle class family's collection of books. Symbolically, though, this was also the most pure space in the house. The realities of daily labor and the maintenance of the body were out of sight,

setting the stage for residents and their guests to perform the behaviors of gentility – behaviors that the text and functions of gift books reinforced.

*The Atlantic Souvenir for 1828* featured the account of two young college students' trip to Saratoga Springs titled "The Vacation" and attributed to "Roy." Roy, as the book's table of contents indicates, was in fact Nathaniel Parker Willis. Willis typically used the name "Roy" for his devotional poetry, and the name represented his identity as a virtuous Christian young man (Baker 25). "The Vacation," however, departs from the religious nature of his early writings as "Roy." In the summer of 1827, Willis actually did travel to Canada and through New York, visiting the resorts at Saratoga just as George Halsey and Mr. Peyton Grey do in his story. Although "The Vacation" is not strictly autobiographical, the story represents Willis's point of view and his own growing experience in fashionable society. The narrator, a Yale student like Willis himself, repeatedly reminds the reader that he is not writing a journal. He cautions, "let me remind the reader, I am not writing a journal. It is difficult to make this light detail run into pretty sentences, like the Spectator; and I shall proceed in my own way" (42). These conversational reminders simultaneously mark the fictitiousness of the account and claim the intimacy of a shared personal story. Halsey's coy comments establish a relationship between the speaker and the reader. Halsey claims "I am not writing a journal, and of course, I am not obliged to tell you . . ." (42). But Halsey *does* tell the secrets of his adventures, even when it means revealing his own social awkwardness. At the end of his trip to Saratoga, Halsey has begun to learn the behaviors of genteel public intercourse. His account of the embarrassments of a young American college boy in society for the first time invites the reader to share humor with the now older and wiser narrator.

Willis offers his readers a very personal look into the fictional life of a man very like himself, but the appeal of this window into a young man's social development reaches beyond mere voyeurism. Willis's George Halsey communicates Willis's anxieties about his own social education and the polish of Americans of his generation. Readers invited into George Halsey's world might already be concerned about their own polish and refinement – they already owned a gift book. Yet even if they had not thought about their own refinement, Willis's story sets up gentility in a way that was appealingly accessible for middle-class Americans. Through Halsey's reflections, Willis celebrates the virtues of New Haven – a place his narrator claims all of his readers have seen (41). For the university student, Halsey claims, "If he is any thing but a stump, the dawn of a classic taste, and the development of a springing intellect have endeared [New Haven] to his associations – and if he is made of the 'finer clays,' he has laid up in his heart the maps of his holiday wanderings" (41). The "classic taste" promoted by the university prepares the young students to appreciate the beauty and refinement of their New England town. Willis, like his narrator, clearly numbers himself among the men of "finer clays" who have taken the scenes of the American town into their hearts. The beauty of the town, however, does not lie solely in its tree lined streets and classically appealing architecture. Halsey recalls the people of New Haven fondly and celebrates their character, "while I remember their polished and delicate refinement as a people, I cannot forget them in the exercise of their generous and unmingled hospitality" (41). Even in a story that celebrates a young man's first adventures into fashionable society, the narrator remembers the inhabitants of his college town fondly. Although they do not exist in the glittering world of the Saratoga resorts, Willis's New Haven residents consistently exhibit polish and refinement. In Willis's account, such qualities grow from

proximity to literature and education, not specifically from intercourse with fashionable society. Willis's ideal gentility embraces refinement but not needless exclusivity. Willis's narrator recalls the hospitality of the people of New Haven with as much warmth as he does their delicacy. In the depiction of American gentility that Willis creates, true polish comes from academic and social education, not necessarily location or birth.

Willis even celebrates intellectual polish as superior to external beauty. In "A Portrait," a poem from *The Token for 1829*, Willis describes a woman who is not beautiful and lacks the "witchery" that classically beautiful woman might claim. This woman, however, has "an intellectual beauty, like a light within a vase" (115). Instead of the fleeting beauty of transparent lips and effervescent movements, she has "a perfect thirst of mind, / And a heart by elevated thoughts and poetry refined" (116). Unlike the classic beauties of transparent lips and smooth foreheads, the woman Willis sketches in his "A Portrait" has the true refinement that reflection on poetry and life produces. While he does not describe university adventures for his female intellectual beauty as he does for his male Yale traveler, his poem does support the same values as his travel sketch. Reflecting on the beautiful has given the woman lasting refinement of the heart.

N. P. Willis was not alone in his view on the importance of education and reading as a means to social development. America's literacy rate had been consistently high for many years, but new prosperity during the first half of the nineteenth century changed the way Americans viewed their reading choices (Zboray 122). Before 1820, Americans tended to see reading as a way to develop skills that could be applied in the world as a means of professional and financial advancement. After 1820, however, Americans began to see the benefits of reading in a less occupational light (122 - 126). Instructional texts remained

popular, as did history, advice writing, and devotional texts. Fiction, however, also gained popularity. Though many Americans and Europeans alike had viewed fiction as a waste of valuable time or even as being dangerous to readers' mental and physical health, nineteenth-century Americans began embracing fiction (130). Readers began viewing sentimental fiction and poetry as a way to educate and exercise taste and emotions – a necessary process for advancement in a society that had begun to value refinement as much as productivity (Bushman 281). Not only did appropriately chosen works of fiction teach the reader the behaviors and attitudes of middle-class refinement, the act of reading was one of the behaviors that the newly-polished considered genteel. Owning books thus served as a display of gentility within an American home. Gift books' overt attention to aesthetic pleasure made them even more conspicuous vehicles for Americans' financial and cultural ambitions.

While American gift books celebrated affection and American talent in their text and traditional use, they were also a way to celebrate financial security and American prosperity. Regardless of the givers' and receivers' views of gift books' claims, ownership and display of the books spoke clearly to the financial status of the buyers. Not every courting lover or affectionate friend could afford to purchase the elaborate books. The books typically cost between two and three dollars but they might be priced as low as thirty-seven cents or as high as twenty dollars (Bushman 284). These relatively high prices made gift books what McGill calls "the first mass-produced luxury commodities" (29). Displaying a gift book proved that the giver could afford to spend money on a non-essential item – an item that promised entertainment, decoration, and instruction for the sentiments. More importantly, the books served as a badge of interest in "culture" and "taste." The buyer of a gift book was willing to

invest capital to buy that which was to transcend the mere exchange of resources. The buyer was purchasing gentility.

Richard Bushman explains that starting late in the eighteenth-century, Americans enthusiastically embraced the idea of gentility. Earlier in the century, only the elite would have cultivated gentility. Middling families who tried to take on the characteristics of polished refinement would have been treated with contempt. Americans' attitude towards refinement changed so much, however, that by the middle of the nineteenth century, respectability had become dependent on the rather illusive qualities of gentility and refinement (xiii). The American middle-class adapted European notions of refinement, developing a system of vernacular gentility that better suited Americans' needs than codes of behavior from European leisured classes (236-250).

For his poem "April" in *The Atlantic Souvenir for 1829*, Willis includes a stanza from Wordsworth's "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways" that describes an individual violet that is beautiful, though unknown to human eyes: "A violet by a mossy stone, / Half hidden from the eye, / Fair as a star, when only one / Is shining in the sky" (30). Willis's poem responds to Wordsworth's vision of a solitary violet declaring, "I HAVE found violets" (30). Willis's first phrase asserts that he has also experienced the poetic beauty of the bright flower, but challenges the isolation of Wordsworth's single bloom. Later in the poem, Willis encourages his readers to imagine participating in the speaker's own experience with violets. "Smell of my violets!" the speaker offers, as if urging the reader to consume his own reflections on the flower that Wordsworth so admired.

As a part of the 1800 second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's poem celebrates the beauty of unpretentious language and life (Bromwich vii). Willis's own

reflection on the flower, however, reinterprets the violet's meaning for his American gift book audience. Willis's speaker highlights the refined attractiveness of the violet, explaining: "There's to me / A daintiness about these early flowers / That touches me like poetry" (31). For the speaker, the violet of all April flowers, has a "simple loveliness," "like hearts / Whose beatings are too gentle for the world" (31). Wordsworth's short passage highlights the simple solitude of a single hidden violet, but Willis's speaker focuses on the delicacy of the blooms. Willis's attention to delicacy rather than solitude reinforces the values of the American gift books. Willis's speaker offers to share the beauty of violets with all who read his poem - all readers must do to discover the hidden beauty of the violet is to purchase *The Atlantic Souvenir for 1829*, while Wordsworth's violet remains less approachable, "Half hidden from the eye" (30).

Hawthorne similarly glorifies vernacular gentility in his story "Roger Malvin's Burial," which appeared in *The Token for 1832*. The story presents a haunted mind, the hint of a curse, and two dead bodies, but Hawthorne also introduces a sweetly domestic woman who creates a refined home atmosphere everywhere she goes. Dorcas Bourne is the daughter of Roger Malvin and the loving wife of Reuben Bourne. As Malvin's only daughter, Dorcas inherited her father's prospering farm, which is "larger, and better stocked than most of the frontier establishments" (Tales 26). In the early colonial American setting, the Bournes start married life as one of the most successful and genteel families in their community. Reuben, however, is haunted by his betrayed promise to Dorcas's father and eventually lets the once-prospering farm deteriorate. After many years of mismanagement, Reuben, Dorcas, and their only son are forced to leave their family home and journey to a new homestead in the woods. Even in this wilderness banishment, Dorcas carries the vestiges of gentility with her. She

lovingly prepares the family's nightly meal: "Her employment, diversified by an occasional glance at the pot, now beginning to simmer over the blaze, was the perusal of the current year's Massachusetts Almanac, which, with the exception of an old black-letter Bible, comprised all the literary wealth of the family" (28). Although Dorcas's reading choice serves a function, her attachment to the genteel activity of reading signals her refinement.

*The Massachusetts Almanac* tells Dorcas Bourne the date, but the almanac is also a near literary ancestor to the gift book. Hawthorne's story promises to cast events beginning with the Indian warfare of 1725 in "the moonlight of romance," placing the setting many years before the development and fashion for literary annuals (*Tales* 17). Hawthorne, however, depicts his character reading a similar type of book that would have been available to the New England family. Dorcas is no longer attended by servants and helpers in her family home and must cook meals alone in the woods. Yet even while she performs this labor, she still recreates the behaviors of the parlor. Safe at home in her hereditary farmstead, a woman of her station might spend the evening in quiet mental labor reading, writing letters, or conversing. Dorcas, though exiled from her parlor by her partner's bad husbandry, demonstrates that for an American woman, gentility is not entirely dependent on setting. Even while cooking in the woods, she makes time to read. Hawthorne, like N. P. Willis, demonstrates his characters' refinement by describing their relationship to written material – a move that would validate the readers' relationship to their gift book. Hawthorne's colonial American family alone in the woods do not have the benefit of New Haven university society, yet the frontierswoman creates the same welcoming hospitality as Willis's narrator celebrates in the New Haven families.

As Dorcas prepares the wilderness space for the family meal, she does her best to create the display of refined dining. Hawthorne explains, “Her sylvan table was the moss-covered trunk of a large fallen tree, on the broadest part of which she had spread a snow-white cloth and arranged what were left of the bright pewter vessels that had been her pride in the settlements” (30). Although Dorcas and her small family will have no guests for their wilderness meal, she finds comfort in the ceremony of fine dining. Hawthorne celebrates the wife’s attachment to the ritual of refinement, setting up the sentimental scene to show the worthiness of a woman who is soon to lose her only son. It is not clear how Dorcas has kept the cloth snowy white in the long days that the family has been traveling in the woods. The cloth, however, is as important symbolically as it is in setting up the domestic vignette. The snowy cloth represents the purity of the trusting wife and her inner gentility.

Hawthorne’s story, though characteristically dark, celebrates relationships and suggests the sanctity of promises between loved ones. Ceremony, it seems, is crucial in Hawthorne’s exploration of the momentous events of human life. The action of the story hinges on Reuben Bourne’s failure to give Roger Malvin the ceremony of burial. This one miscarried life event disrupts the family’s ceremonies for the rest of the story. Remembering his broken promise, Reuben mourns at his own wedding. Dorcas prepares a delicate evening meal in the forest and her son’s life ends without the appropriate ceremony. Hawthorne’s portrayal of the dark consequences that result from the lack of appropriate proceeding supports the American movement toward vernacular gentility. His story hints that not only do the most pure individuals naturally perform refined rituals even in the worst of circumstances, the lack of these ceremonies can have dire consequences. For gift book readers, the story validates the position they already occupy in reading a gift book. The

reader, or someone they know, has performed a ritual of affection by participating in the exchange of a sentimental gift.

In function, gift books are sentimental presents, but the contributions remind the reader that affection and relationships are the basis of American gentility, not just pleasing gifts. Gift books fashion themselves as a sentimental gift with moral substance. As Wetmore's poem suggests, a book of literary and artistic contributions adorns the mind while jewels represent only external beauty. Gift books promote an American notion of refinement with moral substance or "true gentility." During the first half of the nineteenth century, Americans became increasingly concerned about the tension between true gentility and mere fashion or vulgarity. Real taste and refinement, people thought, came from internal character and morality. Naturally, these qualities could not be purchased, though the appearance of such qualities might be duplicated with consumer goods (Rubin 4 –5). Gift book contributions promoted true gentility, often separating characters' gentility from material wealth. Gift book owners displayed the decorative books demonstrating their own access to material goods, but the contributions inside the books claim to combine emotional substance with the refined exterior.

In Hawthorne's "The Great Carbuncle" from *The Token for 1837*, a young couple learns that objects of beauty have little merit unless they enrich the owners emotionally. Although the country couple comes from a "rustic" background, they discover the basis for true gentility proving that character and moral refinement do not lie in wealth at all. Matthew and Hannah, a newly married couple, have decided to search for the legendary Great Carbuncle. Matthew explains their motivation to other adventurers: "we shall need its light in the long winter evenings; and it will be such a pretty thing to show the neighbors

when they visit us. It will shine through the house so that we may pick up a pin in any corner, and will set all the windows aglowing as if there were a great fire of pine knots in the chimney” (Hawthorne 931). Even though the couple’s ambition for the gem is sentimentally domestic, a gift book reader would already be primed to see relationships as more important than objects, no matter how beautiful or useful for finding lost pins.

The story stresses that love is the best light to brighten a home with all other household decorations as merely supplements to the true beauty of conjugal love. When the reader first meets the couple, the narrator explains that the young woman was “melting into the rich glow of a young wife’s affection” (928). Like the carbuncle, the young wife glows, but her radiance grows from her relationship with her new husband. The narrator hints that carbuncle cannot match this light of true love. On the final morning of their quest, the young couple “awoke from visions of unearthly radiance to meet the more blessed light of one another’s eyes. They awoke at the same instant, and with one happy smile beaming over their two faces, which grew brighter with their consciousness of the reality of life and love” (932). The bright light of the couple’s love is “blessed” and is part of the “reality of life.” The carbuncle is also radiant, but its “fervid splendor” is unearthly and does not appear to be a part of nature (934). At the top of the mountain, “there was no life but what was concentrated in their two hearts” (933). The couple carried true light with them in their supportive love for each other. Compared to this genuine radiance, the carbuncle’s glow is dazzling, but only an empty alternative for the true light of love.

Hawthorne’s young couple returns to their humble cottage where, as the narrator explains, they “spent many peaceful years, and were fond of telling the legend of the Great Carbuncle” (936). The story of their adventure is more valuable to the loving couple than the

unearthly jewel promised to be. The tale serves the couple as entertainment for their guests and allows them to celebrate their genuine affection for each other. Matthew and Hannah proposed to display the carbuncle for their guests, but when they keep only the story to share, their domestic happiness is not disturbed by the harsh light of the purely decorative gem. When the couple beheld the glowing jewel, “They seemed changed to one another’s eyes, in the red brilliancy that flamed upon their cheeks” (934). When they tell the tale of their adventures, however, they can celebrate their own relationship and the more refined enjoyment of sharing stories with guests in their peaceful home. The light of love and true gentility does not change the couple like the vulgar brilliance of the carbuncle did. Rejecting the jewel and keeping only the story allows the couple to see each other as they really are and enjoy that genuine beauty for many peaceful years.

Unlike Reuben Bourne in “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” Matthew and Hannah make the right choice. They discover the power of their relationship with each other and return to their cottage to enjoy their peaceful life together without the harsh glow of the jewel. While they live simply in a country cottage, Hawthorne’s honest lovers achieve true gentility – they are happy to live peacefully maintaining a well-ordered home and sharing their stories with guests. The couple’s rejection of the vulgar carbuncle shows their true character and good taste. Matthew and Hannah do not achieve the intellectual refinement Willis celebrates in his characters, nor does Hawthorne show them reflecting on written text. The couple does, however, have the tale that they share with all who enter their home. Whether the guests believe the tale or not, the couple has a story of affection that they can offer, not unlike the way readers might display a gift book in their own home.

Whether buyers were looking for the true gentility of good character or simply the appearance of refinement, gift books offered them a way to practice polish. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Americans began developing codes of behavior and ideas of gentility beyond the codes of the colonial elite. Gift books offered Americans a way to acquire polish through reading and reflection, but the performance of reading demonstrated the owners' interest in refinement to others. Because gift books balanced pride in American productions and interest in European scenes and behavior, their symbolic meanings both appealed to and encouraged the trends of middle-class culture. Gift books' decorative physical presence and sentimental contributions worked together to demonstrate refinement through display and to reinforce the values of vernacular gentility in the contributions.

## Conclusion

*The Atlantic Souvenir* and *The Token* fashioned themselves as gifts of affection and even made suggestions about potential occasions of exchange in their full titles. Just as Ackermann's English *The Forget Me Not* is a "A Christmas, New Year's, and Birthday Present," *The Token* is, according to its title page, *The Token, Christmas and New Year's Present* and *The Atlantic Souvenir* is *The Atlantic Souvenir; A Christmas and New Year's Offering*. Although the act of presenting a gift book for specific holiday occasions developed before American publishers fashioned their own gift books, the focus on holidays reinforces American gift books' delicate balance of interests. As a gift both for Christmas and New Year's celebrations, gift books span the gap between the old year and the new, symbolically representing their position between tradition and innovation. As a book for the new year, each book celebrates national possibility and personal potential for the owner. As a holiday gift, *The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir* participate in systems of tradition, connecting their promise of American growth and fertility with the European-inspired traditions of America's past.

From the first passages of *The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir*, editors, publishers, and contributors balance traditions and future potential. The introductory material for these books frame each volume in claims about the merit and possibility of American literature and art, yet the contributions and even the form itself explore Americans' relationship with European behavior, settings, and history. Because all of these elements come together in the American gift book form, they provide a valuable way to understand the interests and tensions that existed between 1825 and 1840. The life of the American gift book form itself, however, provides an important perspective on the contributions that the volumes contained.

Nathaniel Hawthorne and N.P. Willis both achieved dramatic success in the years following their gift book contributions, but the conventions and claims of the gift books to which they contributed provide context for the early works that helped introduce the writers' work to the American public. The contributions highlight, support, and explore the claims American gift books made. Contributors like Hawthorne and Willis were young when they began submitting work to Goodrich, Carey, and Lea. At those early positions in their careers, the young contributors did need the money that the contributions provided. These factors, however, do not diminish the importance that each contribution represents in the relationship between gift books' larger claims and each individual passage. Hawthorne's stories, many of which he revised only slightly for his later collections of stories, have received significant scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> The stories' first appearance in gift books is, however, often trivialized in a way that ignores the important relationship between the claims and meaning of the gift book form and the contents of the stories. For both Hawthorne and Willis, the context of their gift book contributions illuminates each individual story or poem, contributing to the understanding of their work and of the audience that received their writings.

*The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir* approach the desires of their audience, balancing interests that might seem mutually exclusive. The enormous popularity of the books suggests that this balance was not only successful, it became a way for Americans to approach their own conflicting desires as they exchanged and displayed the books. Gift books did, of course, grow out of the publishers' economic concerns. The books are mass-produced beauty for largely middle-class audiences and, consequently, scholars have often discounted the books, hinting that gift books' mass-produced sentimentality could have little

bearing on the concerns of art, literature, history, and culture. The books, however, are important precisely because of their mass-produced sentimentality; the success of the books proves that this type of material resonated with book buyers' and readers' interests during the years that they were popular. Although gift books' once-elaborate bindings are now worn and their arguments about the fertility of the American imagination have been proven many times over, the books' and their literary contributions serve as souvenirs of antebellum America.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In his discussion of gift books, *American Literary Annuals and Gift Books*, Ralph Thompson claims that the popularity of gift books highlights a blossoming of American national pride that led the growing American middle class to search for ‘culture.’ According to Thompson, gift books were ideal for the aspiring American middle classes that were looking for a way to demonstrate growing American prosperity. Gift books, he explains, “appealed to the eye and the heart rather than to the mind; they were handsome and costly; they were ‘artistic’ and ‘refined’ – qualities that were easily accessible to middle-class buyers and readers (4).

<sup>2</sup> For more on gift books’ development from almanacs and annuals, see Thompson (3).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of taste as a popular and aesthetic term, see Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* and Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century*.

<sup>4</sup> *The Atlantic Souvenir for 1828* featured “Forget Me Not” by Francis Cosby, Jr. and *The Atlantic Souvenir for 1829* began its literary contributions with “Forget Me Not, Imitated from the German,” by F. G. Halleck.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Token* for 1828, 1832, 1833, 1835, and 1836.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Willis’s college years and his employment with Samuel Goodrich, see Thomas Baker’s *Sentiment & Celebrity: Nathaniel Parker Willis and the Trials of Literary Fame*.

<sup>7</sup> For details on Hawthorne’s revisions to his gift book contributions, see *Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Tales* edited by James McIntosh (260 – 264).

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