

SOUVENIRS OF AMERICA: AMERICAN GIFT BOOKS, 1825 – 1840

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ABSTRACT

The Token and *The Atlantic Souvenir*, two of the most popular and successful American gift books between 1825 and 1840, balance claims about the merit and possibility of American literature and art while exploring Americans' relationship with European behavior, settings, and history. *The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir* offered buyers and owners a way to support American creativity while they displayed gentility inspired by European behavior. The enormous popularity of American gift books suggests that this balance became a way for Americans to approach their own conflicting desires.

While many of the writers who contributed to *The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir* achieved popular success beyond their gift book contributions, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Nathaniel Parker Willis are particularly notable because of their later popularity and associations with Americans' perceptions of Europe. Hawthorne's stories, many of which he revised only slightly for his later collections of stories, have received significant scholarly attention, but the stories' first appearance in gift books is 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.