

The Story of Macaria

“the southern best-seller of the war”

(Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, p. 135)



Augusta Jane Evans
(1835-1909)

“The wartime creation and reception of the Confederacy’s best-selling novel forcefully illustrates the meaning of both writing and reading in southern women’s lives. Augusta Jane Evans published *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice* in 1864, dedicating it to the Confederate army as an ‘inadequate tribute’ from a woman ‘debarred from the dangers and deathless glory of the “tented field”’ to the ‘patriotism and sublime self-abnegation of her dear and devoted countrymen.’”

(Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, p. 168)

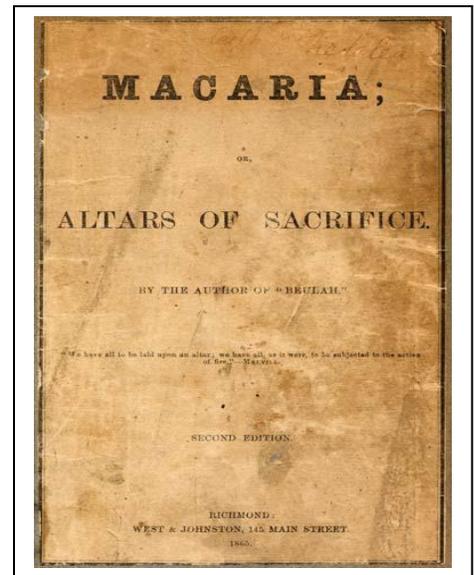
From *Macaria* (p. 140-141)

"Irene, answer me one question, dear child; what does the future contain for you? What hope have you?--what do you live for?"

"I have much to be grateful for--much that makes me happy; and I hope to do some good in the world while I live. I want to be useful--to feel that I have gladdened some hearts, strengthened some desponding spirits, carried balm to some hearth-stones, shed some happiness on the paths of those who walk near me through life. There are seasons when I regret my incapacity to accomplish more; but at such times, when disposed to lament the limited sphere of woman's influence, I am reminded of Pascal's grand definition: 'A sphere of which the centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere;' and I feel encouraged to hope that, after all, woman's circle of action will prove as sublime and extended..."

"But who pointed your aims and taught you these theories?"

"The emptiness of my former life--the insatiable yearning for solid, unalloyed happiness. I enjoy society and cling to many social ties; but these alone could not content me. I love the world better for striving to be of some little use to it, and I should be pained to have anybody believe that I have grown misanthropic or cynical, simply because I sometimes tire of a round of gayety, and endeavor to employ my time usefully and for the benefit of my race. I felt the pressure of the iron signet which the Creator set to his high commissions for life-long human labor, and breaking the spell of inertia that bound me, I have, in part, my reward."



Source: Augusta J. Evans, *Macaria* (1864),
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/macaria/macaria.html>