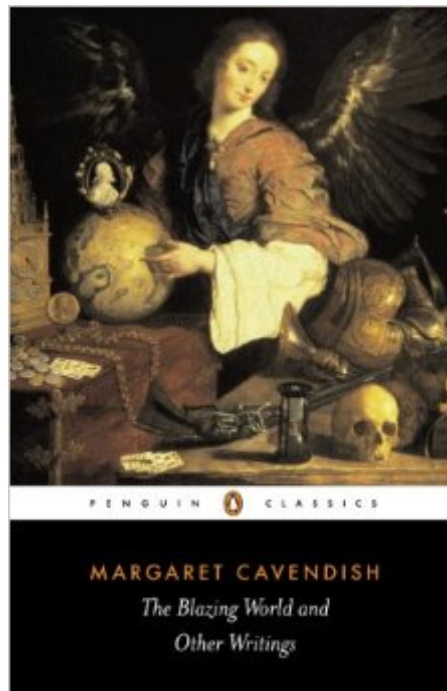


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The Blazing World And Other Writings (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The Blazing World is a highly original work: part Utopian fiction, part feminist text, it tells of a lady shipwrecked on the Blazing World where she is made Empress and uses her power to ensure that it is free of war, religious division and unfair sexual discrimination. This volume also includes The Contract, a romance in which love and law work harmoniously together, and Assaulted and Pursued Chastity, which explores the power and freedom a woman can achieve in the disguise of a man. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Reading any type of 17th century literature in the 21st century creates a unique perspective. In particular, The Description of a New World allows for appreciation for Margaret Cavendish's bold attempt to empower women and set precedent for female writers to be creative. It is a story that starts somewhat romantically: a merchant kidnaps a lady he is in love with, but progresses to the merchant dying whilst doing so, only for the lady to be shipwrecked to another world. Quickly made Empress of this 'blazing world', she is able to engage in philosophical and intellectual

discourse with the new world's inhabitants. Throughout the story, you are able to identify the symbolic importance of this science fiction utopian society and its connection to Cavendish's realistic hopes of encouraging creativity among women. By explaining this other world with utmost detail she is able to give a plausible outlook on a society where a woman is respected and trusted with power. It is helpful to understand a little biographical information about Margaret Cavendish. She lived through the civil war in England, and was eventually separated from her family "which gives an interesting perspective of how the heroine in *The Description of a New World* was stripped from her home and family, stranded to an unfamiliar world. Although often criticized for her work, she wrote true to her beliefs and interests. She was fascinated with science, believed in a monarchy (evident also through this piece of literature), and most importantly believed in her potential as a woman to be regarded as an intellectual. With interesting opening remarks from her husband, William Newcastle, and Cavendish herself, it is evident that although her world is fictional, it is one where women can relate to and even strive for.

"A Merchant travelling into a foreign Country, fell extremely in Love with a young Lady" • writes Margaret Cavendish in the opening sentence of *The Blazing-World*. Though this sounds like the introduction to a typical love story, the book quickly proves itself to be something entirely different. Cavendish details the Lady's kidnapping, shipwreck, and rescue by strange creatures, half animal half human, in a foreign land named the Blazing World. As one of the pioneers in the genre of science fiction, Cavendish gives remarkable descriptions of the new world and of its inhabitants through the Lady, who soon becomes the world's Empress, and her unrelenting curiosity. This is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, though written in the seventeenth century during the Scientific Revolution, as a woman, it is surprising both that Cavendish made the decision to delve deeply into scientific thought, and that she was educated enough to do so. The second reason is what sets *The Blazing-World* apart as a feminist utopia; not only does she include long passages filled with questions about how the world works, she also uses a female protagonist to do so. After being granted unlimited power to rule as she pleases through marriage to the Emperor, made possible by Cavendish's creation of a world unlimited by gender stereotypes, the Empress calls together each species on the Blazing-World and divides them into the societies for which they are most suited. Through her discourse with each species, the Empress explores philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, politics, mathematics, and religion, among other things.

Margaret Cavendish was an influential female author of the 17th century, whose literal works were a

means of conveying not just her aspiration for fame and power, but her desire for the betterment of female standing in a male dominated society. In *The Blazing World*, we are presented with an interesting combination of themes, of which include science, discovery and exploration, imperialism and more. Cavendish creates a utopian society with interesting characteristics that reflect upon how she think the world should work, using elements of fantasy and realism to do so, which makes the reading both interesting and thought provoking. It is easy however to become frustrated with the reading, and at times uninterested. It is written in Old English, and it goes without saying that not all things translate well to contemporary languages. This convolutes some of the ideas the author tries to get across, and makes the reading somewhat difficult. It is however worth pushing through, as the book is eloquently written, and has a way of charming the reader with its fantastic elements and intelligent metaphors. The author's emphasis of the importance and power of imagination over the simplicity of tangible and material things is even inspiring. It relates well to real world issues and presents logical and intriguing ideas for how a society could potentially work. In addition, her use of science and objectivity help to keep the text from straying too far from reason, and strengthens the points made by the author, as they are essentially unbiased and logical. Given the time period and existing gender roles of women, subtlety was imperative. Cavendish does a wonderful job in conveying her aspirations for the betterment of women through the cover of a utopian society and imaginary figures.

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