



The Dazzle of Day

Molly Gloss

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A *New York Times* Notable Book

The Dazzle of Day is a brilliant and widely celebrated mixture of mainstream literary fiction and hard SF. Molly Gloss turns her attention to the frontiers of the future, when the people of our over-polluted planet Earth voyage out to the stars to settle new worlds, to survive unknown and unpredictable hardships, and to make new human homes. Specifically, it is a story about people who have grown up on a ship that is traveling to a new world, and about the society and culture that have evolved among them by the time they arrive at their new home planet.

The Dazzle of Day Details

Date : Published March 15th 1998 by Tor Books (first published 1997)

ISBN : 9780312864378

Author : Molly Gloss

Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy

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From Reader Review *The Dazzle of Day* for online ebook

Michael Woods says

Probably not for your average sf fan, but I enjoyed it and would recommend it for anyone who enjoys well-crafted prose normally ascribed only to "serious literature." Molly Glass takes an insightful look at the effects long-term, deep space travel has on the occupants of a space vessel traveling from Earth to a distant star. Once they have arrived, the travelers must then work out the technical and emotional challenges of transitioning from a space-faring community that has been in transit for many generations to settling on a new world. The author focuses on five separate characters and their relationships to one another to tell this story.

One of the things I enjoyed about the story was the author's description of the Quaker community that comprises the society of the space travelers. This element was reminiscent of the religious communities that settled North America in the 1600's, seeking to build a society based on their own beliefs and values.

But, as I said earlier, the typical fan of the sf genre may not appreciate Gloss' stylistic character studies or her attempt to blend the elements of hard and soft sf. For the most part, I enjoyed the novel and found it a wonderful departure from the emotionally-bereft, formulaic tendency in which the genre has been going the last couple of decades. (Seriously, most sf authors may as well use robots instead of human characters!) The only fault I find in the novel is the author's use of dialogue. There are strong differences in the personalities between the characters, and while this is conveyed in the narrative, they have a tendency to speak using identical mannerisms. For instance, I find it hard to believe that people of diverse cultures (mostly Latino, but also Anglo, Japanese and Norwegian) all end their sentences with the interrogative, "Eh?" This similarity in speech makes it difficult to figure out who is speaking, sometimes.

A full four out of five stars.

Christaaay - Christy Luis Reviews says

About: A new generation of pioneers seeks sanctuary from our dying earth in a mission to a new planet. Only the patient, whole-minded Quakers have worked out the challenges to turn these theoretical missions into a reality. This literary hard sci-fi follows the takeoff, the problems encountered during the mission and the effects of those challenges on the very human community that rises to meet them. *Published 1998, Adult Sci-fi.*

The Short of It: This book will appeal to a certain kind of reader, certainly, because of its carefully crafted tech details, people and atmosphere. I care about two of the three (people and atmosphere), so I liked it. The complaint I hear most often (and agree with) is that the plot moves *very* slowly.

What I Loved: (1) The setting and descriptions worked with other elements to create pitch-perfect tone in this novel of "the new frontier." It's beautiful and bleak, a real gem. (2) Molly Gloss slows down each moment so you can understand the psychology of each moment, sensation and act of humanity—grief, adultery, lust, fear, etc.—and you grow to care for these flawed people because you see yourself in them. (3) I also loved the cultural vision and authentic feeling of the Quaker meetings, both the personal and collective experiences of them. They feel very genuine, neither sentimental nor unfeeling. Having attended small religious meetings

all my life, I was tickled to recognize the characters in the Quaker meetings: the elder, the blah-blah-er, the gossip, the elderly, etc.

What I Didn't Love: (1) A few things didn't ring quite true—such as when a God-fearing person refers to humans as animals. Maybe futuristic Quakers will accept a completely naturalistic explanation of life, in which humans are considered animals; but I doubt that this will ever be a majority opinion among spiritual communities (although I have very little familiarity with Quaker theology). I think the reverence for our humanity, the thing that separates us from animals, is too great for that sort of casual comment. It sounds like agnosticism trying to mask itself as theology.

But those moments are comparatively rare. Gloss got the important thing right, namely that for all the truthful, searing human folly present in every character, there is also a certain peace about the community that rings just as true.

(2) The plot is a bit of a snore, although the tension in the writing still kept me reading. The structure and purpose of the book were better formed than they are in your typical character or plot driven novels. This novel was more “idea-driven,” or, as Orson Scott Card might have put it in his *Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, “milieu-driven.” The wandering plot feels designed to mirror the wandering quality of a Quaker's movements in the spiritual realm—waiting for the spirit to speak through them to the community at large. Waiting. Listening. Then, perhaps, speaking.

Other Comments: There is some very technical jargon about the ship and the theories of survival. I don't really understand or care about those, but I thought I'd mention them in case they matter to someone else.

Recommendation: For adults who love thoughtful, literary sci-fi and for readers wanting an intro to hard-sci-fi (because the book is rather short).

3 stars for characters, atmosphere and cohesive vision.

Favorite Quote: “When people are feeling the weight of their own lives, they want to see the life other animals are given, and there is something mysterious and revealing about the discarded machinery of birds' lives. In abandoned flakes of eggshell, emptied seed cases, the hollow stems of cottongrass, in the delicate attenuated backbones of fish and the teeth of desiccated crustaceans, you can sometimes glimpse the bare and intricate structures of God” (239).

You can follow my speculative fiction reviews and videos on my blog, Christy Luis Reviews: Speculative Fiction.

Melissa says

This is a great coupling of literary style and writing with the sci-fi/fantasy genre. Gloss has a thoughtful narrative style that is worth taking the time to slow down and really read. Subtle cross-sections of culture, science, and the humanism that permeates everything.

Lara Messersmith-Glavin says

I have a special thing for Molly Gloss. Her books "Jump Off Creek" and "Outside the Gates" were both startling finds for me in high school. She even visited my English class once - an unusual bit of luck for a girl stranded in the smallest of small-town isolations - 19 people in my class, 17 of them boys. My English teacher took her and me out to lunch and she showed Gloss some of my writing. I was mortified, but she, at the very least, pretended to be impressed, inscribed a book for me, and urged me to carry on with my writing. One of these days I'll track her down again and thank her. Even if the 16-year-old girl wasn't ready for the encouragement, the 32-year-old reminds herself of it daily.

This book is what reviewers often call "richly imagined." In a seemingly short number of pages, she unearths whole complex worlds full of introspective and believable humanity, the sort not often found in science fiction. Her meditation is less one of technology and more one of universals, of the persistence of human tendencies, human fears and loves and works, in the most unlikely of settings.

The plot is an escape from a broken world, a flight from a dying planet to a new one that spans hundreds of years and generations of humans aboard a living spaceship full of streams and fields and insects and all the necessary trappings of an agrarian existence. The most interesting aspects are that these people 1. are Quakers, and 2. speak Esperanto, an artificial language that never quite took root anywhere since its creation as a hopeful global lingua franca in the late nineteenth century.

I have little background in the beliefs and practices of the Quakers, other than a vague familiarity with their meeting styles and a consciousness of their contributions to civil rights and peace movements. I am impressed with their practice of shared silence, and the weight Gloss gives this form of consensus-shaping as a political and community model. I love that, even in fiction distant from our own contexts we still find reflection for our practices.

This is a heart-breaking book, in the way that life is heart-breaking. It is full of questions and rolling continuity rather than neat answers and ends. It is both very complete and totally open-ended, in a hopeful sort of way.

Sharlene says

Molly Gloss has written an intriguing, quiet book that speaks volumes in *The Dazzle of Day*. This is a very international book. Escaping from a dying Earth, Quakers from various countries (they speak Esperanto!) have found themselves a home on board the *Dusty Miller*, a self-sustaining but ageing spaceship. A crew has been sent out to explore a frozen planet as a possible future home. Bjoro is among the crew, and the planet isn't something he's prepared for:

"He had thought in the filmcards he had studied of unbounded landscapes, of storms and snows and seas, there remained no surprises. It hadn't occurred to him, the vast depth of the third dimension. He hadn't thought he would fear the sky."

The funny thing about *The Dazzle of Day* is that nothing seems to be happening, although things are actually

happening. The crew crashes on the frozen planet, someone dies when out working on the sail, all major events that are but a sideline to the relationships, to the tales of the daily lives of these Quakers, such as Bjoro's wife Joko and son Cejo, these people who work the fields, who cook in the kitchen houses, who take part in meetings and discuss their future on this frozen planet, who look after their families and each other.

"For 175 years they had gone on talking and thinking and making ready for leaving this world. They had lived for 175 years in a kind of suspended state, a continual waiting for change, but it was a balanced and deep-grounded condition, an equilibrium. They knew their world, root and branch, knew its history and its economies. The human life of the Miller and the life of its soil and its plants and animals revolved together, in a society that was well-considered, a community that was sustaining. Some people thought they had lived for 175 years in a world that was a kind of Eden."

But there are no answers. Or at least the book doesn't leave us with any firm ones.

The Dazzle of Day is a book best described in opposites. There is an ending, but it is not really the end. It is a story of beginnings and endings. The words are quiet, but also full of strength and understanding.

Christine says

A short novel about a future human colony living on a starship in outer space, looking for a new world to inhabit. If the sci-fi theme puts you off, think again on this one. The colony is a group of Quakers and the sense of community, human struggle, philosophical discussions and truthful relationships are what makes this book shine. Deeply insightful without stilted propaganda or unaccessible techno-talk, Ms. Gloss takes us to some of the darkest regions of the soul and gives us the courage to ask if life is still valuable enough to keep going, if community is something we short-change in this narcissistic decade of self. My only impatience was with the first and final chapters - needed bookends for the story, necessary for the whole picture but I felt the final chapter a bit of a drudge because it pulled away from the interpersonal conversations and became heavily detailed in the mechanics of the future world. Still, a book that will live with you for many years after you've read it.

Dana Stabenow says

A Quaker version of the "if this goes on" science fiction story, told in three parts. Earth is poisoning itself and a Quaker community in what was western America builds a self-contained space colony and sets sail for Epsilon Eridani. Part two hundred forty-seven years later, they arrive at a planet that is cold and unfriendly but habitable, and they have to decide to land or to continue on and look for something better, and if they do decide to stay, how to live there. Part three is a couple of generations later on on the new planet.

I like the premise better than the writing, but Gloss has given this some thought and there are some interesting bits.

When Dolores on earth is thinking of maybe not leaving after all, she says "I, for one, had thought every isolationist party from Aryan Nation to Doomwatchers would soon flock up to the sky, but what has been proven by these toroids is only the absolutely unmindful benightedness of the greater part of the human race. The very difficulties and economics of a closed circle of recycle and reuse have kept the stations, against all

expectation, in the hands of the patient and whole-minded..."

Committees (Design, Ceramics, Waters, Business) run everything at Meetings, and moving down to the planet is the topic of discussion of one Weekly Business Meeting. Should they stay on board the Miller--"If we go down there...many of us will die it'll be hard life...I don't see why we need to come out in the sunlight...This place is an Eden, it's the body of God...We ought to just stay right here..."

Or should they move to the planet? There is a high incidence of insanity, suicide, and birth defects on the Miller, and the maintenance is unceasing. Much of this argument is moved by the faith that put their ancestors on the Dusty Miller to begin with--"Where there's a hardship, generally there's a grace to be found in it..On that world...it's all hardship, and I wonder: What is the saving grace?"...Maybe it's a bare-bones existence that we'd be enriched...Maybe the hardships would be a good thing." Someone else says "...what is the meaning of people who have uprooted themselves from ancient soil and are trying to go on living in a container of air and water, separate from the rest of the Creation?"

It's a fascinating conversation, and one you could imagine happening between a group of people whose great-greats, motivated by their faith and a desire to leave a dying planet, gave birth on the way to a generation of people who have no personal knowledge of a habitat they didn't themselves build and maintain. What happens if they can't grow mangos on the planet? They like mangos.

The scene with Juko on the sails is enough to give you agoraphobia, and the scene with Bjoro's first encounter with the planet is enough to give you frostbite, but mainly worth reading for the ideas.

Russ says

First chapter knocks my socks off every time I read it. Like this group of Quakers, haven't we all wanted to push away from Earth and start again?

Interesting exploration into decision making and reliance on technology even while trying to escape a planet overrun by its effects.

An all time personal fave.

Jeffrey Moll says

There is a specific and positive tone within the language of *The Dazzle of Day* which gives it a different feeling than those felt towards the first set of novels. Adaptation within the community is the focus of the novel while it can be questioned that *Survival of the Fittest* would be a stronger argument. The Quakers escape the tragedy of the world because they are 'worldly' people which desire a place to expand humanity and survive. It is fitting that Quakers leave the earth and understand the time in which to do so; the history of Quaker societies prove the ability to survive within their means while keeping a positive and watchful eye on the future. It is important to cite that the novel focuses on a specific type of survivor, one that has never

followed a conventional life, this gives Molly Gloss an interesting tool to use when classifying main characters—that is if there are any.

Angus-Michel says

This is a fantastic book. It's about a group of Esperanto-speaking Quakers (yes, I know, but listen) who board a generation starship (yes, I know, but bear with me) and set off for a possible earthlike planet. The bulk of the story takes place when they're nearly at their destination, and it's a fascinating exploration of what the journey has done to them, with the ingredients from when they left Earth (their ancestors were a mixed group of Quakers from all over the planet, including Japan, Scandinavia, Central America, and others, and their culture is a mixture of all of these). Not a story with a major struggle, protagonist versus antagonist and all that, but a story of people doing what's left to them to do. Highly recommended.

Justin Howe says

Basically if I start a book one day and finish it the next, it's going to get five stars from me.

Sure, this book's plot is oblique and the major conflicts are mostly domestic. Yeah, there's the looming question of whether or not the colonists will leave the generation ship and settle on their new world, but what kept me reading was whether or not Juko patches up things with her ex-husband, and the social intricacies of life aboard the ship.

Fans of Ursula K. LeGuin will enjoy.

John Addiego says

I thought this was brilliant speculative fiction. The writing is beautiful, the notion of this flawed Eden-like star ship with its intentional community of Quakers weighing the spiritual values of their journey was full of surprises and insights. Walt Whitman's voice runs throughout! No easy answers, no obvious heroes or villains, but a profound sense of the journey of the soul is played out in unexpected ways.

Octavia Cade says

A thoughtful, interesting novel. Quite slow, but I don't mean that negatively - there's a sort of dreamy pacing that goes well with the temporary nature of migration, the doomed setting of the life that's made on the ship. It's a good life too, but it can't last - though I can't help wondering how the Quaker settlers, so steeped in ecological holism, justify what must be the wholesale slaughter of the lives they've nurtured - the ecosystem aboard the *Dusty Miller* surely won't survive the new fridity of life planet-side. They discuss everything

else in an attempt to reach consensus, but never this. I kept waiting for it...

Wealththeow says

A loose, slow-paced novel about a small colony of Quakers who have finally arrived at a habitable planet after 175 years in transit. Slowly but surely, they reach a consensus about whether to colonize the planet or stay aboard the colony ship that is all they've known for generations.

This book really frustrated me. It was so unfocused, and although all sorts of exciting things happen (crashlanding on a planet! a desperate rescue mission! a plague!) they all happen in the peripheral vision of the characters. Even when a POV character is trying to pull someone from a surging sea, they've got page upon page of stream of consciousness about how they feel about their daughter's marriage and how they used to ski on a nearby mountain and such. The constant ruminations not only slow the book down to a snail's pace, but they feel completely unreal. I'd buy that one or two people undergo long thought processes during stressful life-or-death moments, but to have the *entire book* consist of characters thinking about their feelings and half-remembered memories and inconsequential opinions about people the reader doesn't know--it strains belief and a reader's ability to stay interested. The characters are, by and large, unpleasant people in a very minor, understated way. They think uncharitable thoughts about those they're surrounded by, or blame others for not mysteriously understanding things they've never mentioned...I know that some people are like that, but **all** of them? It was too much, and listening to their POVs left me in an unpleasant mood.

I did like the discussions that took place about whether or not to stay on the *Dusky Miller*. But that was literally the only thing I enjoyed in this entire book. And considering how fascinating the premise is, that is a damn shame.

Contains suicide, various bodily indignities due to old age and illness, rape, and the death of a child. There are numerous POV characters, all people of color, and most of them are middle aged or elderly women, which is a nice change.

Matthew says

An infuriating piece of science fiction, this novel while well written, is odd and at times hard to read. I enjoyed the way that the chapters were set up, with beginning and ending chapters that present the past and the future, and a storyline that follows specific characters, in a very specific order. But I generally disliked the lack of detail that is absent, in regards to the ships and the other common science fiction elements. While I can see why Gloss did this, changing the focus to the characters and their struggle and increasing the focus on these elements, it just annoys me that so little time is spent on the setting. Also, I found that the various Esperanto words that are intermingled into the narration detract from the story, making the novel a little harder to read and understand, unless constant translation is carried out.
