



Dyschronia

Jennifer Mills

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One morning, the residents of a small coastal town somewhere in Australia wake to discover the sea has disappeared. One among them has been plagued by troubling visions of this cataclysm for years. Is she a prophet? Does she have a disorder that alters her perception of time? Or is she a gifted and compulsive liar?

Mills' novel takes contemporary issues of resource depletion and climate change and welds them to one young woman's migraine-inducing nightmares. Her prevision anticipates a world where entire communities are left to fend for themselves: economically drained, socially fractured, trapped between a hardscrabble past and an uncertain future.

Oscillating between the future and the past, *Dyschronia* is a novel that tantalises and dazzles, as one woman's prescient nightmares become entangled with her town's uncertain fate. Blazing with questions of consciousness, trust, and destiny, this is a wildly imaginative and extraordinary novel from award-winning author Jennifer Mills.

Dyschronia Details

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Author : Jennifer Mills

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From Reader Review *Dyschronia* for online ebook

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘How do we see what we can’t imagine?’

One morning, the residents of Clapstone, a small Australian coastal town awake to find that the sea has disappeared. Thousands of sea creatures are left dead, and the stench is horrific.

‘Nothing like this has ever happened to us, not here on the uneventful instep of Australia, facing away from the world.’

One of the residents, Sam (short for Samandra) has been troubled by visions of this event for years. What does this mean – both for Sam and Clapstone? Is Sam a prophet? Is Sam a liar? Hold on to those questions: it’s unlikely that the answer will be quite so binary, so neat. Sam’s visions, her migraine-inducing nightmares anticipate a difficult dystopian future. The story moves between past and present, between the different views of Sam and the townspeople.

I found this a challenging book to read. While I found Sam’s perceptions and experiences of time thought-provoking, I struggled to keep track of past, present and future. My own version of dyschromia: I need to be able to relate each part to the whole in some kind of chronology. The fact that I couldn’t always do so easily made the world even more alien, more dystopian. And, in many ways, this is the power of Ms Mills’s novel: things happen, there are not always logical explanations, the town lurches towards an even more uncertain future.

‘A town is like a child, see: you might have dreams for it but it makes its own way, out of spite sometimes, and always out of your hands.’

I read the novel slowly, concentrating in order to understand. The reactions of the townspeople had me wondering how most of us would deal with something similar. Would we believe Sam, would we expect more from Sam, or would we ignore her? And Sam herself: how does someone make sense of a world when their experience of time is different from everybody else? In the meantime, the community becomes disadvantaged, isolated and trapped. An environmental disaster, a social disaster, a world in which few of our usual reference points are useful.

I finished the novel, resolving to read it again at some stage. It’s imaginative, extraordinary and unsettling. It’s time.

‘Here’s a prediction: the future never turns out the way we think it will.’

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Jay-Dee Davis says

This book is terrifying and beautiful.

Terrifying because of just how close to home it feels. Set in an Australian coastal town, the sights, smells, and touches feel so familiar that the events depicted seem likely to happen 20 minutes away from my house.

Beautiful because of the writing. The author is clearly incredibly talented. The prose is consistent and well suited to the story.

It's mostly driven by character rather than by plot, switching narrator and time period between chapters. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it may cause some confusion for the reader. It's definitely not a book that you can rush.

Steph says

This is an intense book. It's not what you'd call fun, and it's not gripping in the sense of a fast-moving narrative full of cliffhangers. But it's one I kept reading, mostly because the imagery is so unsettling that I wanted some resolution to prevent those rotting cuttlefish hanging in my mind, unable to dissipate because I didn't know what would happen next.

The book jumps back and forth in time, focussing on the main character, Sam, and a second narrator whose name I'm not sure we find out. There are at least three "strands" of narrative set at different times (Sam in the past, Sam in the present, and the second narrator), which eventually come together, and they seem to all move forwards in time (as opposed to backwards or some other sequence), but the time in each strand moves at different speeds and the three strands aren't labelled, so it can be difficult to know which chapter belongs to which strand, and when the chapter is set. The story of Sam's childhood and teenage years seems to be set in approximately present-day Australia, with teenagers texting each other and riding their bikes around, with the story progressing to oil shortages and holographic bird-messengers a decade later. But the era is hard to say for sure.

All this leads to an intentionally muddled sense of time, when the reader doesn't always know what is current versus what is past, or what is imagined versus what is real. There's also a pattern of muddling between what a person says versus what they actually think, and what they perceive versus what is happening.

It's all very confusing - intentionally I'm sure, as the bending of time and truth is the whole point of the book - and it forces the reader to either think and concentrate very hard, possibly causing their brain to hurt, or to just roll with the dreamy vibe and just stay on track enough to keep up with the broad narratives and themes. I chose the latter.

Others have said this book is hard to categorise but I'd call the genre "literary dystopian fiction". It's a genre in which I think I've only read one other book: *Gold Fame Citrus*. I prefer *Dyschronia*. The plot is more involved and the Australian-ness is endearing (for me as an Australian anyway). Also unlike *Gold Fame Citrus*, there are characters who are infuriating but also some who are both believable and lovely.

The other novel it reminded me of was *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living*, set (like *Dyschronia*) in a small Australian town, full of residents who are out of luck, desperate for hope, and get lured into a scheme that the reader can see is doomed from the start - and hence are forced to look on helplessly as the inevitable disaster unfolds. That book is set a hundred years earlier than *Dyschronia*, with some similar themes, making me think: what goes around comes around... but hopefully not really in the form of rotting cuttlefish...

Linda in Utopia says

Spotted this beautiful cover in an Hobart Bookshop, turned it around and the first sentence did electrify me straight away: "One morning, the residents of a small coastal town somewhere in Australia wake to discover the sea has disappeared."

This book is strange, wonderful, alien and written with well chosen words. You can feel that the author "gave birth" to this book, that is must have been a long writing process. This is nothing you can just write down in 3 months. The characters are too complex, the jumping between times too often, it wants all your attention.

The first chapter gave me shivers. I had images in my head. Of course a reader should have images in his/her head, but it was more like... seeing a film. I felt like I am in cinema and I see the first scenes of a fantastic film like "Three Billboards outside ebbing missouri" (just without the funny parts).

The author does not spend time on specific descriptions, neither for characters nor surroundings. You have to really read between the lines, to understand these characters, to let these scenes build themselves up.

This strong first chapter is followed by the day when the sea disappears, a dreamy, hectic description from the people living in the village. The story then goes up and down like waves, with very strong parts and not so strong parts, where the sentences float through the pages, not really connected to each other. I found some of the dreamy thoughts of the main character a little bit too long, could have worked with less.

Meanwhile, the book has a Twin Peaks-esk feeling to it but the Australian setting makes it alien and dystopian.

This is not an easy read, I had to fully concentrate on the words and the jumping between times and all the things that are not spoken between the vaguely said things. But it's a magical book if you let it and I will definitely read it again.

Clare Rhoden says

I loved this book, and I'm still thinking about it. That's a sign that it has some important things to say, I think. There are also many phrases that I noted as worth re-reading, and adding to my list of cool things written by excellent authors.

The story in this novel is like a cracked mirror - there are shards of time and we don't always exactly know where or rather when we are - but every piece shines with reflections of reality that we almost recognise, but of course everything looks different now that reality has been broken apart and reassembled.

This novel charts the dystopian future of a careless Australia, where the environmental damage is so gross that there is no future to be had. The wondrous, worrying dreams of local girl Samandra (Sam) are dismissed as, Cassandra-like, she debates how much to tell the people around her, people who prefer not to believe. Her mother Ivy in particular is determined to be head-in-the-sand, spending years trying to have Sam's migraines diagnosed correctly. The resulting pronouncement of 'dyschronia' never quite settles the question, for Ivy, of whether Sam is truly foreseeing the future or just dreaming vividly and strangely. The entrepreneur Ed (who is meant to be charming, but I have pre-raised hackles about this kind of guy) is a credible saviour-cum-villain - or is it villain-cum-saviour? - of the town. Sam's best friend Jill is probably the most likeable of all the characters. I loved the device of the 'chorus' of locals whose comments intersperse Sam's dreams and Sam's story.

Equally prescient of a dire future and nostalgic of the simple ignorance of the past, this elegant story of loss and the inevitability of bad choices deserves an enduring place among the best Australian books of recent

years.

Jodie- Readthewriteact says

This book was sent to me by the publisher for my honest review.

Have you ever wondered how the world will end? Maybe, you stop and think about the impact we are having on the planet with our need for more, more, more? Dyschronia isn't the answer to your questions, or is it?

Despite the stunning cover, this is not a pretty book. Well constructed story? Yes. Interesting characters? You bet. Happily ever after? Hells to the N.O. This is a tragic tale of a child (Sam) with exciting foresight, that reveals itself as something darker as an adult. It makes you question, if you could see the future should you keep it to yourself or tell the world?

Chopping from differing prose to different events in the future, it was a bit tricky to gain a sense of what is going on at times early on, but, as a reader you adapt to this quite quickly so not to miss crucial parts of the story. Sam is such a troubled soul and certainly isn't one of those characters that everyone will relate to, you would be hard pressed to find anyone who could relate to her really. It seems like a lot of the events that she pictures are then manipulated by others for personal gain, but given the world in which they live, it hardly seems fair to judge. I mean if you had nothing wouldn't you try that make the most of a bad situation?

This is a beautiful, dark and somewhat confronting book. It is smart and well constructed, giving the reader the feeling they are in Sams shoes by losing sense of time. The conclusion of this astounding piece of fiction will be embedded in your mind and stay with you long after you have turned the last page.

Alison says

Incredible. Devastating. a poetic and yearning critique of industry, capitalism, greed, and people's passive belief in life going on. Amazing split narrative between the collective and the individual, and the precarious and random movements of time in individual consciousness and the earth's life. A definite dose of climate change anxiety that I had to slow down reading in order to process. A tour de force.

Tien says

Baffled.

Hence my star rating of 2 probably doesn't worth much. I loved the cover and I was intrigued by the blurb, "One morning, the residents of a small coastal town somewhere in Australia wake to discover the sea has disappeared." I, therefore, expected some sort of post-apocalyptic sort of novel and while it was in a way 'post-apocalyptic', it wasn't... not really.

I struggled by the time shifts; I can't even tell you how many there were supposed to be... There were the future (in visions?), the present, and the past; I know these for certain but there were time strands for each time anyway and there's no particular warning, they can change within a chapter, a space or an asterix to

indicate end of a section does not particularly help. Thankfully, there were only 2 perspectives: Sam's (though she's the one having visions so that didn't help in anyway) and the town people's (using the royal 'We').

I think I understood that the book's themes revolve around the environment, climate, and corporate scams that in the end, only the plebeians suffer the consequences. I'm just not sure whether getting your point across despite the baffled reader is enough. I do have now an appreciation of the cuttlefish... not enough not to eat them (not that I eat them all the time). I am just so sorry that I could not love the book!

Michael Livingston says

A bleak and intriguing climate dystopia, about greed, small towns and the inevitable destruction of our environment that's coming at us while we all pretend it's not. I sometimes struggled to keep the three different threads of the story untangled in my brain, but loved some stylistic approaches (like the collective narration of sections from the town's perspective) and found the whole book very powerful.

Laura says

A haunting, circular tale that loops between timelines in a small Australian town. Some beautiful writing centered on a strong sense of place.

The novel operates within three timelines: two of which are from Sam's POV, the third from the remaining townspeople's POV, the collective 'we' who narrate the post-disaster present. There is something Kafkaesque about their dealings with bureaucracy, machinations in which private corporations move in, holdings pass hands, town investors receive mysterious letters and numbers are dialed where no answers are reached on the other end. All of it sets the tone of a persistent people trying to make sense of a cataclysm that cannot be explained. The town itself runs wild around them, nature overtaking the ruins of what came before, as they are left to their own devices.

Sam is the centre of the story, a slave to time and visions of the future which, ironically, tend to occur because she has revealed them to others: a self-fulfilling prophecy. There is a frustration to Sam's obedience of following the course of events of a future she barely glimpses. She is a frustrating, stubborn character whose strength to see it all through I found surprisingly admirable. I read to the last page wanting to know that her suffering was worth it.

Her relationship with her mother, Ivy, is fraught with tension because of her visions and the townspeople rotate between disbelief, hatred and awe of her. Ed's relationship to both Sam and Ivy seems purposely vague. While there is an initial flirtation between himself and Ivy, subsequent interactions between them seem chaste, as if they are merely strangers living in the same house. Ed subsists on Sam, Ivy and the townspeople like a parasite. He is the figurehead of the shadowy bureaucracy the townspeople become familiar with, the salesperson whose ambition and greed is easy to distrust.

This book paints some of the most haunting scenes I've ever read. I recently watched the Netflix series, *Dark*, which similarly revolves around a town stuck in a time loop. There are scenes in the show which cut between places accompanied only by a haunting violin- this is how I pictured many of the scenes of *Dyschronia*. A

town overcome with white frost. The sculpture of a giant white cuttlefish beneath the Ferris wheel of a long-abandoned fairground. Bloating corpses left to rot a sea-less ocean floor.

I feel like this story will stay with me for awhile.

Lisa says

The first thing to say about Jennifer Mills' fantastic new novel is that you should not be put off by its title. You don't need to know what it means, you don't need to worry about pronouncing it properly because even if you do get it right, the librarian or the shop assistant will probably look puzzled anyway. Best to write it down on a piece of paper!

(And no, it's not the name of that blue creature on the front cover. That's a type of cephalopod, better known to us as a cuttlefish, the internal shell of which people who keep birds in cages use for the birds to nibble on). It's a most disquieting novel. The people of a coastal town wake up one day to find that the sea has gone from their coastline. The sands are covered with putrescent creatures and rubbish and everyone goes indoors to avoid the revolting smell. The scene of devastation is too big to contemplate a community clean-up, but these people don't work together as a community anyway. The first person plural narrator who tells us this is world-weary and fatalistic: speaking on behalf of the town this voice conveys a sense of hopelessness and of people no longer in control of their destiny. The only time these people are ever proactive is when a young girl called Sam foresees a great flood and they all take out flood insurance so that they can cash in on it. Sam's real name is Samandra, a name with echoes of the Greek oracle Cassandra, who was doomed to have her prophecies disbelieved. Sam's narrative is told from her point-of-view but not in her voice. Her perspective is limited because she's only seven when the novel begins, and she doesn't understand the visions that come to her when she has dreadful, disabling migraines. She sees the future only in fragments and when she tries to explain what she's seen of course her mother doesn't believe her. She takes Sam on a round of medical appointments to deal with the migraine, and she either dismisses everything Sam tries to convey or she comes up with a rational explanation for it.

Until, that is, Sam foresees six men fall to their death from a tower in the asphalt works.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2018/03/13/d...>

Deborah Ideiosepius says

Dyschronia is a difficult novel to classify, character driven in a lot of ways with beautifully descriptive narrative it is full of strange self referential loops, some of which tie time into pretzels, others which wind the characters into strange shapes and experiences.

The setting is a small coastal town somewhere in Australia - the great Australian bight, one suspects - sometime in the not present. While in many ways consistent with 2018, there are subtle elements of dystopian future throughout the setting and events. They are not the focus of the plot in any way, but they serve as a frame in which the mining town (asphalt) of Clapstone can play out the story.

The main character is Sam, as a young girl she gets migraines and slowly grows into the realisation that the things she sees in her migraines are future events. The story oscillates between the different voices, Sam's and the townspeople, the different times, future present and past in a way that is quietly enchanting and for the most part I was thoroughly enchanted.

As we go further through the cephalopodian theme becomes stronger and stronger ; the cuttlefish on the cover is not just artistic licence, cephapods and the ocean are very real players in the story. This part definitely enchanted me, cephalopods are a neglected branch of literature and they were integrated into the narrative flawlessly, from the start.

I think this is a lovely book which I would recommend thoroughly! My only criticism would be that because of the drifting, self referential loops it is a difficult book to pick up for short amounts of time. One really needs a good solid half hour or so, possibly more, to read it in as otherwise one loses track of where in the narrative one is. This is easy to do at the best of times, is probably even intentional but it did make me reluctant to pick it up unless I knew I had uninterrupted reading time. Also, I personally did NOT love the ending; I found it beyond ambiguous and it did not leave me with a 'completed' feeling, it felt like the ending just drifted up and it stopped because, why not.... This I suspect will not be the common reaction to the ending, in a lot of ways it fits the narrative and I suspect many readers will like it.

In general though, great book by a great author, I will be gravely disappointed in awards panels if it does not appear on any prize lists over the next year or two.

Kimberley Starr says

I love the way this book is imagined. For instance, time doesn't just have speed, it has weight. A young child accepts that she seen things that NOW hasn't quite caught up with. Once surprise at its narrative world wore off in the second half of the novel, perhaps it could have moved more quickly to its conclusion.

Figgy says

Review to come.

In the meantime: some sincerely beautiful and raw and dreamy and tangible writing here. It's not what you would call plot driven, but it doesn't exactly fall into character driven, either... it's somewhere in between. The story takes places across three different times within the same small (fictional) Australian town.

The opening chapter is actually the start of one timeline, but 8+ years after the other timelines, and near the end we get to discover stuff from right back at the beginning, because time is not so straightforward for our MC.

I feel like you'd call it sci-fi-lite crossed with magical realism in an almost literary setting.

Time travel, but of the *The Time Traveler's Wife* variety, in that it is a biological thing and outside of our MC's control. Otherness of the *Eleanor* variety (the vibe of the novel is a lot closer to this than *Time Traveler's Wife*). Beautiful language that kind've reminded me of *The Chimes* (at a rough guess, though, because it's been years since I read that one).

Sarah says

This book was provided to *Farrago*, the student magazine of the University of Melbourne as a media release by Picador, the review is also available on the website. Link provided below.

Lyrical Looming, Jennifer Mills' *Dyschronia*.

Jennifer Mills: *Dyschronia*

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"Here's a prediction: the future never turns out the way we think it will. Simple enough, but that's not the end of it. The past isn't what we thought it was either." (237)

You have no idea what you're in for when you pick up a copy of Jennifer Mills' *Dyschronia*. Captivated by the front cover's ominous art work, you, the reader will never be sure what's coming next and where the story goes.

Following the life of Sam and the thirteen or so other remaining residents of the Australian coastal village of Clapstone, readers are faced with turbulent alterations of time throughout the novel as the town changes ownership and it becomes the goal of many companies, such as Apsco Asphalt to 'improve' the community. From a young age, Sam suffers horrendous migraines that give her premonitions of events to come. It is said that "everyone had headaches. But only Sam claimed there was meaning to them" (32). As Sam predicts the disappearance of the sea and multiple suicides, the "pain and perception of time created a dissociative loop, a splitting migraine as a self-fulfilling prophecy" (64). Through this Mills offers us a tormenting tale of time and the Australian landscape.

The novel is heartbreakingly Australian, and as a resident of a small growing town, I felt a resonance with the writing. Everyone knows what you are doing on a given day. There is no escape from your surroundings. This is even more prevalent from Sam, who cannot escape it in any timeline.

"When is this?" she asked her mother.

"You mean what." Ivy frowned between towels.

"Oh yeah." Sam smiled, but her eyes betrayed a panic. (19-20)

Mills' writing is poetry. I admired the way that the voices changed throughout the novel - the omniscient "we" speaking for some chapters, combined with Sam's own perspective, kept me on my toes. However, whilst I was captivated by this consistent curving of time, I constantly felt like I was missing something. Like I needed to sit down and read this book with a group to understand it further. However, this may be a strength in some ways, such as for analysis in a literature class - which I do hope becomes a thing as I would love to learn more and read varying opinions. It's intriguing and difficult to pull yourself away from - like a migraine itself, the voices of this book echo long after the initial interaction.

I also felt there was a strong sense of environmentalism within the novel. Constant concerns for the ocean, and the lack of "end to the garbage" (179) we deposit into the world. Mills holds strong concerns for the means in which we interact with the world. The past, after all, impacts the future.

Dyschronia is not a book I would have initially picked up, however upon reading it, it has opened new ways of considering the world for myself. If you're looking for a beautifully written read that will keep you on your toes and leave you haunted long afterwards, this is it.

“There is a thread. A ligature. Time trundles on its axis, and it unravels. A line is a line. She follows behind.” (293)

<http://farragomagazine.com/2018/02/06...>
