



Closing Down

Sally Abbott

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No matter how strange, difficult and absurd the world becomes, some things never change. The importance of home. Of love. Of kindness to strangers. Of memories and dreams.

Australia's rural towns and communities are closing down, much of Australia is being sold to overseas interests, states and countries and regions are being realigned worldwide. Town matriarch Granna Adams, her grandson Roberto, the lonely and thoughtful Clare – all try in their own way to hold on to their sense of self, even as the world around them fractures.

What would you do if all you held to be familiar was lost? More importantly, where do you belong?

An extraordinary debut novel from an exciting new Australian voice.

Closing Down Details

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From Reader Review Closing Down for online ebook

Emily Briggs says

4.5 - A terrifying glimpse into our future. I just needed more answers!

Deborah Ideiosepius says

Flawless storytelling and beautiful writing combine in this book to make a reading experience I will not soon forget. The story deserves every grain of sand in those five stars I gave it, but whoever put together the blurb on the back deserves to be out of a job.... more on that later.

Actually, no, I will START with the blurb on the back and I will copy and paste it, which I almost never do but I have a point to make: *No matter how strange, difficult and absurd the world becomes, some things never change. The importance of home. Of love. Of kindness to strangers. Of memories and dreams.*

Australia's rural towns and communities are closing down, much of Australia is being sold to overseas interests, states and countries and regions are being realigned worldwide. Town matriarch Granna Adams, her grandson Roberto, the lonely and thoughtful Clare – all try in their own way to hold on to their sense of self, even as the world around them fractures.

What would you do if all you held to be familiar was lost? More importantly, where do you belong?

Reading this description I thought that I was getting a work of fiction based in reality. Because a lot of Australia's small towns really *are* struggling to stay afloat. And, yes, lots of Australia *is* being sold to overseas interests without sensible precautions. As I had not read any realistic fiction recently I picked it up and spent the first part of my reading experience bewildered. Because, as it happens, this novel is pure dystopian science fiction, excellent quality, fully adult dystopian fiction of a caliber I have not seen for a quite a while.

Once I sorted that out in my mind, I was fine but the narrative starts so gently and in such a narrow focus that it is not immediately obvious. Perhaps the author designed it that way and the reader is not meant to know initially, that we are reading in a future where globalisation has become impersonally threatening, climate change has caused massive collapses in weather patterns and worldwide overpopulation and refugee problems are out of control. All this turmoil is the background for a remarkably peaceful, character driven reading experience which, as I said earlier, I found pretty much flawless.

The scene descriptions of the land and the urban populations are fascinating and often chilling. Having the two main characters, Clare and Roberto be from such diametrically opposed parts of society makes the world building rich and comprehensive and gives the reader a unique chance to go from the single person to the global perspective. The way Clare and Roberto's stories slowly come together is deftly and lightly done and makes for an entirely satisfying ending to the story.

Some readers, those who like their stories fully explained, might find one aspect of this book annoying. No spoilers, but throughout, in several places and for a number of characters there is an aspect that I can only

think of as magic-realism. These are not glancing references, they are plot builders in a few ways for both main characters, but they are not ever explained. I know a few people who would be dissatisfied with this element of the novel though I found it quite charmingly surreal myself.

All in all the only part of the description on the back of the book that I can fully support is the last bit; *An extraordinary debut novel from an exciting new Australian voice.*

It is definitely that, and a rare example of a work that I feel fully deserves the prize it won.

But, seriously, whoever wrote that blurb on the cover! Surely if they were too busy to actually read the book or find out what it was about, surely they have an intern or something who could do it for them? There will be so many people out there who would love this book but will never pick it up, because they will have no idea what it is about.

Rachel Watts says

I loved this novel, a broad but intimate apocalyptic future in regional Australia.

Amid rampant inflation, water shortages and mysterious bones falling from the sky, the Australian government enacts the Energising Rural Australia policy - A New ERA! - and starts closing down country towns, forcibly shifting the inhabitants into ever more overcrowded cities.

Desperation, waves of refugees and overcrowded, murderous, internment camps are the new normal. But the devastating vision is lifted by remarkable appeals to magic realism - quite unexpected and effective to my mind. Recommend to lovers of dystopia and apocalyptic fiction.

Theresa says

Closing Down is a really interesting work of "cli-fi". Set in the near future, it imagines a world that is struggling with the effects of climate change, and the social, political and economic difficulties associated with it. Rather than a plot-driven novel, the story meanders, slow and steady as one of the three main characters on her nightly walks through town - she doesn't walk to get anywhere, specifically, but just to move and observe.

Likewise, the main focus of this novel is world-building and characters. There are three main characters, as well as the narrator who occasionally interacts with them. Robbie, a jet-setting journalist; Granna, his grandmother who has made the best of her privilege; and Clare, an unemployed battler who walks and watches. They don't really interact until about halfway through the book, and by then the reader has a good sense of who they all are.

For me, though, it was the dystopian future that held the most interest. Abbott has created a world where the north and west of Australia are being closed, forcibly and permanently evacuated. The towns and cities where people are being moved don't have the infrastructure to cope with the population influx. Around the world, weather extremes and food insecurity seem to be the norm. Millions of refugees flood to processing centres. Some choose to try their luck in a reality TV competition, which airs in Australia and presumably elsewhere in the world - viewers watch as refugees try to navigate boats through plastic-strewn and shark infested waters (at least the sharks have survived!) in order to keep their food rations for the week. A phone

call to a Centrelink-like service, whose call centre is located underneath China, casually reveals that citizens no longer need to fill in forms; the government can track everywhere we go and everything we do through our phones anyways.

It is because this future is so based in our own, and seems plausible, that the novel is so unsettling and such a page-turner. It isn't all bleak - there are glimpses of escape:

"And that is the thing. It is hard to close things down. They have always tried, in different ways and using different means. Tried to close down a voice, a movement, a town, a country. But people find ways. They always have. Ghosts find ways too. They even find ways together."

I only wish that there were a few more answers regarding some of the stranger elements - the ghosts, the resistance movement, the walkers. While the ending does wrap up some plot elements rather neatly, I finish the book feeling in the dark about lots of what appeared within the pages.

Nancy says

Aurealis Award Best SF Novel short list 2017
Rural Australia...this could happen!

Review

Kathryn O'connor says

Beautifully written, terrifying story about Australia in the near future. The characters and images stayed in my mind long after I finished reading. Abbott completely nails the Zeitgeist with this one. Highly recommended.

Veronica says

I loved this. Beautifully written, with authentic characters and a deep heart to its exploration of a (terrifyingly plausible) environmental apocalypse. While the effects of the speculative elements are deftly drawn, it's primarily a deeply-satisfying character-driven story. At times it reminded me of David Mitchell's stunning *The Bone Clocks*.

My curiosity wanted a little more filling in of details about the wider world (especially given the main characters were all relatively privileged within the societal breakdown taking place globally), and the ending was a bit too neat, but those are only small quibbles. *Closing Down* is a powerful and moving debut novel.

Andrea says

Rural Australia is both developing and narrowing. The selling out of Australia to foreign interests has

resulted in multitudes of country towns closing down and officially ceasing to exist. Centralizing the displaced has become the solution to the increasing shortage of food and resources. Generational land ownership comes to a forced end, and for the residents of the bush communities, the country of their birth is becoming unrecognizable.

Clare is eking out an existence in country Myamba, dependent upon her government rations and the small routines of her domestic life. She hasn't yet joined the walkers, the homeless who drift from town to town, but her night time activities have her crossing paths with their increasing ranks. Clare's husband continues to wallowing in his despair and their rented property will shortly be taken away from them. Clare must think of somewhere to go where she will be safe.

Robbie and Ella's lives are lived in snatches of time between work trips, and their careers increasingly reveal to them the insanity at work behind the facades of government and large corporations. People just don't behave like they used to. Robbie longs to return home but isn't sure that Myamba holds the answers either to the disintegration of kind society that he is witnessing.

Compassionately and carefully constructed to be something quite precious, *CLOSING DOWN* is a novel that does not attempt to create an fantastical and unbelievable landscape of future Australia. Instead, it takes concerns already present in our current debate and presents their possible eventualities, some of these being the erosion of our national identity, the issue of climate change, and the strangulation of enterprise by unnecessarily pedantic overview and the repeated lashings of bureaucratic red tape. Presenting a possible composite result of where our cultural fears may lead us, *CLOSING DOWN* illustrates the concerns and divides of living in a country at the bottom of the world that faces unique challenges not only due to its geographic location and harsh environment, but also because of how it may be considered to be a soft target in the global community.

There are supernatural elements in this book that add curious little vignettes to the storylines of both Clare and Roberto. They shouldn't really work in the context of what is often a gritty slog through dread and dissolution but somehow they do. If you're seeking clarity throughout your read you may often be disappointed as the novel can often seem to be meandering about rather than moving purposefully.

The specifics of living in a such an narrowing society has altered the citizens living within its constraints. In *CLOSING DOWN* this has not only affected the behaviours of its people of its animals as well. As society erodes, the manic activity of centralization and conformity continues to charge senselessly ahead and the bewilderment experienced by the characters in this novel is both relatable and frightening. It's a huge testament to the author that all the ingredients included in this book have not resulted in a work so bleak that there appears to be no way free of its gloom. Somewhere between the governmental guidelines are lives continuing to be lived in *CLOSING DOWN*, largely in ignorance, and increasingly in fear, but being lived regardless.

CLOSING DOWN was the 2015 winner of the Richell Prize for Emerging Writers, and the debut novel of author Sally Abbott.

Vickey Foggin says

This is a chaotic combination that mixes a climate-change based dystopia in the year 2040ish and a magical

realism that includes Chinese ghosts, intelligent cats and a mysterious man who drugs people with scents. There are also dashes of libertarian grumbles that imply that the world is going to hell because of government meddling. No one is happy in this future world but the characters are trying to get by as best they can. The non-magical characters are very well crafted, and the depictions of the Australian landscape and rural life are excellent, but the story is so weird I couldn't really enjoy it. I read to the end because I wanted to understand what was going on but it's never really explained. If you like visualising the downfall of society or the weirdness of the 60's TV show *The Prisoner* or the vagueness of the show *Lost* you might like this more than I did.

Hachette Australia gave me a copy of this book to honestly review.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘How has it all come to this?’

There are three main characters in this dystopian novel, set in an Australia which has largely been sold off to overseas interests. Rural towns are being closed by a remote central government, people are being displaced and dispossessed. The land is dry and food is limited. But the problems are not just confined to Australia: the countries and regions of the world are being realigned. Who cares about the human cost?

The main characters are Clare McDonald, Granna Adams and her grandson Roberto (Robbie). Clare walks the streets of Myamba most nights. She walks to escape: it’s the moving that matters. Clare thinks about the towns being closed, and what it means. Granna Adams creates and distributes care packages for those who have lost loved ones, their livelihoods, their homes. Robbie loves Ella, but they are often apart. Robbie travels around the world in search of newsworthy topics while Ella is a human rights worker, settling refugees where they are ordered to go.

From the opening page, this novel captured my attention. I was drawn in before I really had any idea of who the characters might be and where the story was heading. While Robbie’s story captured my heart, it was Clare and Granna who keep hope alive. These two very different, resilient women combine forces in Granna’s home, the House of Many Promises, to try to improve life for others. They do: in part because of the foresight of the man who originally built the house, and the rest you’ll need to read for yourself.

This is one of those novels which is best read, not explained. The components lack the magic of the whole. It’s imaginative, and disturbingly possible. This is Ms Abbott’s debut novel, and won the inaugural Richell Prize for Emerging Writers in 2015 from a field of almost 1000 entries.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Brenda says

Clare found comfort in walking – every night she walked the quiet and lonesome streets of Myamba, two hours north of Melbourne until almost dawn when she returned home to sleep. Her thoughts were constant; the main topic in her head was the closing down of hundreds of towns; of rural communities throughout

Australia. The devastation was taking over huge areas with people deciding their own ways of coming to terms with what was happening to them.

Robbie and Ella loved each other but often their jobs kept them apart. Robbie was constantly flying from one country to the next as he searched for the best news article to write, while Ella did her job settling refugees where they were ordered to go.

Granna Adams, Robbie's grandmother, spent her time creating care packages for those less fortunate – those who had lost loved ones; their homes and livelihoods destroyed – Granna meant a lot to many people. She lived in Myamba in the House of Many Promises, which had been built decades previously by a Chinese man who'd had a vision that would mean much to future generations...

Could Granna, Clare and Robbie make a difference in a world which was gradually losing everything that was familiar? In a world where nothing or no one was safe anymore?

What an amazing, brilliant and breathtaking debut novel! Aussie author Sally Abbott won the Richell prize for emerging writers in 2015 when she submitted the first three chapters of *Closing Down* to Hachette Australia and wow! what a future she has ahead of her. *Closing Down* is different to anything I've read before, but it's one I won't forget for a very long time. Extremely highly recommended.

With many thanks to Hachette Australia for my ARC to read and review.

Michael Livingston says

I loved parts of this - the climate dystopia is terrifyingly plausible and the corporate takeover of government already feels basically complete - but I got a bit frustrated by it in the end. The magic realism elements felt out of place to me, and the story centred itself on a fairly privileged group of people without really engaging much with the stories of any of the individuals whose suffering formed the backdrop to the story. There's a lot to like here - Abbott's imaginative and writes well, but I was so excited by the first third or so that I'm feeling a bit disappointed at the end by the book's failure to quite live up to my expectations.

Caroline says

A thought provoking book that had me thinking about it for weeks afterwards. A great read and excellent book group choice with lots to discuss.

Soph says

I did love this book, and maybe 4.5 stars is more accurate, although I'm finding that there were so many unanswered questions that it actually has been very frustrating upon contemplation. Where did the bones come from? Who was the little blond girl? What was the significance of the forbidden house in Greece? It is definitely one of those stories that stays with you.

Great characters, including several strong and flawed females (my favourite). The writing was beautifully

descriptive, (but not too wordy). I truly loved Abbott's prose and can't wait to read more from her. A talent indeed.

Due to some violence, I would read prior to providing to younger teens. And I will be choosing this for my book club, (with a warning).

Jacqui-Lou Read says

I signed up for a speculative fiction story set in the near future: the premise of Australia's rural areas being 'closed down' was unsettling and alarmingly plausible. I did not, however, sign up for magical realism, which is not so much woven into the central narrative as dumped indiscriminately throughout. It's perhaps the fault of the publisher for touting Closing Down as something that it's not, but the magical realism parts felt maddeningly irrelevant. Why are there bones falling from the sky? Why are there intelligent cats and ghosts and magical cakes? I hope you don't want these questions answered, because they won't be.

I am often awed by the detail and world building in speculative fiction, but in this instance, incorporating magical realism elements just detracted from the story. It felt like the author was cheating. I was looking forward to reading this because I've always hoped that there will be more good speculative fiction (for adult readers!) coming from Australian writers, but it sadly hasn't happened yet. I appreciated the character of Clare, and the back stories of some of the residents of the town, but overall I was disappointed.
