



TRICKS OF THE MIND

Andrea Goldsmith's latest work is rich in ideas and complex, well-rounded characters, writes books editor **Fran Metcalf**





ANDREA Goldsmith is getting ready for the same ritual she performs every time one of her novels is released.

"The bookshop I went to as a child is older than me and the owners have always liked to do something when a new book of mine comes out," she explains. "The original owner passed the business down to his son, who retired about six years ago and sold the shop to a new owner, but she still asks me to continue the tradition of doing a reading from my new novel, so that's where I'm going tonight."

Goldsmith has been performing those readings for more than 20 years. Her first novel, *Gracious Living*, was published in 1990.

Now she has a Miles Franklin Award under her belt and is the author of seven novels. Her latest, *The Memory Trap*, was released this month.

Like her previous works, which explored universal concepts such as friendship, ambition, family and love, *The Memory Trap* exposes the nuances and complexities of a seemingly ordinary concept – memory itself.

"We rely on memory so much to make sense of ourselves, our lives, our countries and yet it can be very deceptive, often incomplete and overlaid with other agendas," she says.

"All you need is two siblings from the same family recalling the same incident from their childhood and you see the tricks memory can play.

"We overlay memory with our experiences, our understandings, our desires and our disappointments, so what we recall is different from one another."

The first half of *The Memory Trap* is written from the point of view of Nina Jameson, a 30 or 40-something Melbourne-born woman with the unusual profession of memorial project consultant. Nina has worked around the world creating monuments to people, history and ideas.

"I have always been interested in monuments, for what they say about the present rather than the past," Goldsmith says.

"All memory, including national memory expressed in a monument, is more in service to the present – what

we want to believe or our current values – than the past it seeks to preserve.

"For example, following the death of Stalin in 1953, there was an avalanche of falling statues across Europe – people destroying monuments to him because the current culture saw him differently from the previous one."

The unexpected collapse of Nina's marriage and an unusual job to help a community group devise a monument to freedom, peace and diversity see her move from London to Melbourne, where she discovers her sister Zoe is trapped in a miserable marriage to American biography writer Elliot.

The cause of their marital troubles lies in Ramsay, a narcissistic musical genius who lived next door to Nina and Zoe when they were growing up in suburban Melbourne. The sisters have always stayed in touch with Ramsay and his brother Sean, despite their international careers, but the relationship between Zoe and the pianist is more than friendship.

"I had long wanted to write about a genius," Goldsmith says. "Are we entitled to let them get away with things because of their genius? How much can genius excuse?"

The second half of *The Memory Trap* is told through the eyes of Elliot. While Zoe fixates on Ramsay, awaiting him to return her affections, Elliot dwells on the happy memories of his early years with Zoe, despite the fact there have been many more loveless ones since then.

"That explosive first glimpse and the first weeks with Zoe have blinded him to the fact it's a miserable marriage," Goldsmith says.

"In the book, Elliot reads an essay by Polish poet (Czeslaw) Milosz called *The Captive Mind*, which asks how so many people in the Soviet system believed they were living in the best system in the world when they were suffering and starving and often in fear of their lives.

"How could they believe something when their perceptions were telling them the opposite?"

"We do this at a personal level too and that's what happens to Elliot."

How Goldsmith came up with the idea to write about memory was partly from the death of her partner, poet Dorothy Porter, in 2008.

"Because I had just lost my partner, memory was fairly relevant to me."

She says escaping into the world of fiction has always been her means of coping with difficult realities.

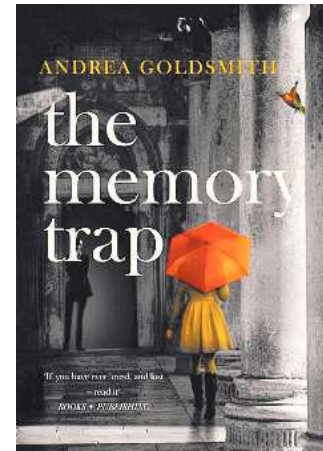
"When I am sitting at my desk and I'm writing, the rest of my life becomes irrelevant," she says.

As she has with each of her previous novels, Goldsmith is processing her latest fictional work by writing a non-fiction essay about it.

"After *The Prosperous Thief* I wrote one about why we need another book that touches on the Holocaust and then, after *Reunion*, I looked at why we need another book about friendship," she explains.

"This one, in *The Memory Trap*, it seems to me that so many different things are revealed about memory and all its complexity. I really needed to get it all in order and that's what a non-fiction essay does for me."

Andrea Goldsmith will be at the Noosa Longweekend Festival, June 14-23. See noosalongweekend.com



The Memory Trap

**Andrea Goldsmith
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