



Goldsmith, Andrea (b. 1950)

by Tina Gianoulis

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Andrea Goldsmith.
Image courtesy Andrea Goldsmith.

Andrea Goldsmith was still a child, seeking solitude within a boisterous family, when she discovered the power of fiction to create an inner world where the mind could visit unknown places and peek into the hearts and minds of others. She devoted herself to the writer's art then and there, starting down the road towards becoming a novelist when she was only eight years old.

When she was a young adult, writing in the evenings after work, fiction continued to be her obsessive love and favorite escape, as she honed the skills that would produce several highly praised novels. Though firmly grounded in the imagined world of fiction, Goldsmith's novels also reflect her own life and dearest concerns--lesbian relationships, her hometown of Melbourne, Australian Jewish culture, and the inevitable, yet unpredictable, effect of the past upon the future.

Born on March 24, 1950 and raised in the city of Melbourne on the continent's southern coast, Goldsmith has Australian roots that stretch back five generations, unusual for that nation of immigrants. Her parents, Jacqueline and Arthur Goldsmith, were middle-class secular Jews who raised Andrea and her brother and sister with a strong Jewish cultural identity.

Although Arthur Goldsmith left school at the age of fourteen, and Jacqueline married upon her graduation from high school, both were enthusiastic readers and thinkers, and the family dinner table was often the scene of lively discussions about political and social issues.

While she was close to her parents and siblings, young Andrea was a quiet child who had difficulty talking and walking. She observed keenly the world around her and read voraciously, especially loving such adult literature as Bertrand Russell's essays and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Her concerned parents took her to a speech pathologist to help her overcome her difficulties in talking. The speech therapist inspired Goldsmith to choose speech pathology as her own career, while the books that provided her with endless worlds to explore inspired her to become a writer as well.

Having overcome her speech problems, Goldsmith says, "Once I got the hang of talking I showed little restraint." In school she became involved in drama and piano. When she was twelve, Goldsmith fell in love with another girl in her class at school. Though that relationship lasted for several decades, in the early years she was painfully closeted. Fearful of identifying as a lesbian, she had boyfriends as well as other girlfriends.

During the mid-1970s, as women's liberation and gay liberation began opening up options for Australian lesbians, Goldsmith came out as a lesbian and began working within the new movements for equality. In 1978, she collaborated with a group of women to write a Lesbian Resource Manual, in which she proudly listed her mother's contact information under the rubric "lesbian resource mother."

Goldsmith trained as a speech pathologist and worked in that field for several years. In 1987, she quit her full-time job in order to devote more time to her writing. She supported herself with contract work with

people with disabilities and a part-time bookkeeping job. During the mid-1990s she began teaching creative writing at Deakin University.

Though she had published her first short stories during the 1970s, Goldsmith's dream was to become a novelist so that she could create the intricate and detailed worlds of fiction she had loved as a child. A passionately hard worker who describes herself as a "long haul, marathon novelist," Goldsmith worked on several novels before she wrote one that she felt was worthy of publication.

At a lesbian party in 1989, she gathered her courage to approach an acquaintance who was an editor at Penguin Books. The result was the publication of *Gracious Living*, an examination of the 1980s and the materialistic backlash that followed the social upheaval of the 1970s. Its title ironic, or at least interrogatory, the novel examines the bourgeois pursuit of happiness.

Gracious Living was followed in 1991 by *Modern Interiors*, a novel that explores the dark reality behind glittering facades and the effects of deceit. It was shortlisted for the National Book Council's Banjo Award and the Lysbeth Cohen Memorial Prize.

Poet Dorothy Porter, who was Goldsmith's partner from 1992 until her death on December 10, 2008, described Goldsmith as, "Melbourne to her toenails," while Goldsmith herself simply refers to the city as "Home." In her 1994 novel *Facing the Music*, she reveals her affection for her hometown in what has been described as "a love letter to Melbourne." The novel, a mystery that explores issues of ambition and creativity, tells the story of a musician who leaves the city only to find how deeply it is his true home.

In *Under the Knife*, published in 1998, Goldsmith explores the secrecy and regret of the past through the relationship of a doctor and his biographer.

She revisits the theme of past secrets and their effect on the future in her most acclaimed book, *The Prosperous Thief* (2002). Described as a "moral thriller," the novel traces a deadly secret from Holocaust-era Germany through three generations and three continents. The novel not only includes, as do all Goldsmith's works, lesbian characters, but also examines the relationship of Jews to the Holocaust and the poignancy of the immigrant experience as second and third generations lose access to their histories. Goldsmith's fluid style keeps the story active, so that even though the novel is ultimately an analysis of the grief of the immigrant, it has the page-turning intensity of a thriller.

In 2003, *The Prosperous Thief* was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award, Australia's most lucrative literary prize given to a "novel or play portraying Australian life in any of its phases."

In an unusual turn of events, Porter was also shortlisted for the award in 2003, for her verse-novel *Wild Surmise*. Goldsmith said being shortlisted with Porter gave her "double the pleasure." Porter observed that the partners were not used to being seen as competitors. "We're very different writers. We have very different work habits and write very different books."

Goldsmith's success as a published novelist has allowed her to retire from all but the most personally interesting teaching jobs. An intensely dedicated wordsmith, she devotes three to four years to creating each of her novels, and her most satisfying classes relate to this painstaking process. The titles of her courses include "Are We There Yet? Writing the Second Draft of Your Novel" and "The Year of the Novel," where she meets with fifteen working writers for five one-day sessions over the course of a year to discuss progress and problems.

Goldsmith is a frequent guest at the Melbourne Writer's Festival and publishes regularly in such Australian journals as *Westerly* and *Frictions*. She has recently completed her sixth novel, *The Real World*.

Goldsmith lives in a Melbourne suburb.

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About the Author

Tina Gianoulis is an essayist and free-lance writer who has contributed to a number of encyclopedias and anthologies, as well as to journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*.