

Mind games add to the drama

Author Andrea Goldsmith has been enjoying success since her first novel was published in 1989. She tells Zelda Cawthorne about her new book, *The Memory Trap*, which explores themes including the deceit of memory and the nature of genius.

Andrea Goldsmith has written a new book.
Photo: Celia Dann

AUTHOR Andrea Goldsmith started off despising Elliot, one of the key characters in her new novel, *The Memory Trap*. He's a biographer of literary women and quite a charmer – except at home, where he constantly baits and belittles his music teacher wife, Zoe.

Then Goldsmith asked herself why Elliot was such a vile bully, and the startling truth emerged: when it came to inflicting emotional abuse, Zoe won hands down.

The Memory Trap is Goldsmith's seventh novel, and since its release she has been swamped with invitations to appear at key literary events around Australia, including the Melbourne Writers' Festival, which runs from August 22 to September 1, and the Sydney Jewish Writers' Festival on September 1.

At 63 and still exuding gamine appeal, Goldsmith is that rare combination of compelling storyteller and engaging intellectual, and her passion for her work is infectious. "I love making up these characters," she says. "I also love the long haul. I'm a marathon runner sort of writer – draft after draft until I'm satisfied – and four years' work, sometimes more, goes into each of my novels.

"Looking back on them, I can see common threads. The main one is the extent to which people will behave badly, even brutally, when they believe they have permission to do so."

Marriage, music, the deceptions of memory and the nature of genius are the themes explored in *The Memory Trap*, which revolves around a quartet – sisters Nina and Zoe Jameson, and brothers Ramsay and Sean Blake, whose childhood bonds have either broken or tightened into obsession over the years.

Internationally celebrated pianist Ramsay is the genius and deeply disturbing. Asperger's? Raging narcissist? Readers will be sorely tempted to play shrink with Ramsay, although Goldsmith sees him as capable of the full emotional spectrum, but only when he's at the piano.

Most balanced and resilient is Nina, an international consultant on memorial projects who survives and thrives despite the callous betrayal of her husband, Daniel – a secular Jewish futurologist partial to fine malt whisky and skateboarding – who abruptly leaves her for a younger woman after 12 years of what Nina thought was a blissful marriage.

"I always have a

Jewish character – gay ones too – and almost everyone was Jewish in my fifth novel, *The Prosperous Thief* (shortlisted for the 2003 Miles Franklin Award)," says Goldsmith, who describes herself as the middle child in a middle-class Jewish family.

She grew up in Caulfield and found it suffocating, although she's intensely proud of her heritage.

"I'm a fifth generation Australian through three grandparents, and my paternal grandfather arrived in Melbourne in 1901 after travelling through Russia, Germany and Palestine," reveals Goldsmith.

"I went to Methodist Ladies' College in the days when quite a lot of the students were Jewish and the fees were moderate. My family went to the St Kilda shul in Charnwood Grove and Friday nights at home were sacrosanct."

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Author

Trained as a speech pathologist, Goldsmith worked with children with cerebral palsy and was a pioneer in the development of communication aids for people unable to speak, before writing her first novel, *Gracious Living*, published in 1989.

She is a respected literary essayist and has taught creative writing Australia-wide, although most consuming are her novels.

For a time she feared *The Memory Trap* would be her last. The crisis of confidence hit home when she returned the final-page proofs to her publisher, Fourth Estate, an imprint of HarperCollins.

"I should have settled back and savoured the moment. Instead I was assaulted by a battery of not-unfamiliar questions: Will I ever write another novel? Do I want to write another novel? ... I felt emptied out, not a spark of an idea," Goldsmith recounts in a piece on her website.

The piece's title, "Starting All Over Again", also refers to the grief and loneliness she suffered after the death in December 2008 of her long-time partner, poet Dorothy Porter, although clearly Goldsmith has emerged from that dark tunnel.

"I'm about to go on a three-week trip to the Galapagos Islands," she says, eyes flashing with excitement. "Volcanoes, giant tortoises, marine iguanas – I'm going to have a ball!

"Will there be a new book? Yes. I'm fascinated by the 1950s, a decade of great secrets and fictional possibilities."

The Memory Trap is published by HarperCollins, \$29.99 (rrp).