Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons
http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/
This is the author’s preprint version of this article.


Poinciana is the first novel of Adelaide psychologist Jane Turner Goldsmith. Two seemingly unconnected people are seeking their origins in New Caledonia. Catherine, a French Australian, discovers in her thirties that her mother had lied about her father’s death when she was a child and visits the island in the 1990s to try to discover the truth. She enlists the help of Henri, an attractive Noumea journalist, but reliable information is hard to come by and much remains unresolved. Meanwhile, years earlier, the foundling Robert, son of an indigenous mother and a French father, lives in a tribal area with a white family whose situation becomes increasingly difficult as the conflicts of the 1980s develop.

Poinciana is a promising start but Goldsmith needs to abandon her psychological jargon. Phrases like ‘assuming the caring role’ should stay in the conference hall. There are technical weaknesses: the time scheme and point of view are often confusing, and Catherine’s behaviour seems unaccountable at times. But the worst problem is over-writing. This is not a thriller with a gripping narrative. The writing is the focus, but language is often not used with the precision demanded by this kind of fiction.