



Hannah Richell **REVIEWS**

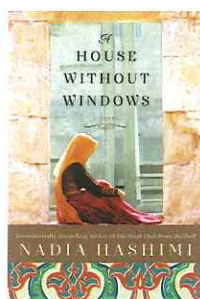
Hannah Richell is an author and Australian book industry award finalist.



THE FENCE by Meredith Jaffe, Pan Macmillan.

Little has changed in Green Valley Avenue since Gwen Hill lived there. So when the house next door is sold, Gwen is curious to meet the neighbours.

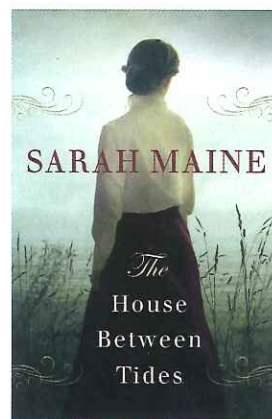
For Francesca Desmarchelliers, the new home is a fresh start for her family - and her marriage. She knows it's going to work out, just as soon as they've erected the fence between their property and the neighbours. With her eye for satire, Jaffe does for neighbourly disputes what Liane Moriarty did for schoolyard scandals in *Big Little Lies*. This is an entertaining, terrifying look at how tensions between neighbours can escalate. *The Fence* is guaranteed to resonate and will stimulate discussions at book groups, too.



A HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS by Nadia Hashimi, William Morrow.

When Zeba is found beside her husband's body, she barely escapes a baying mob. Passed to the law, she awaits trial in an

Afghani prison, Chil Mahtab. Zeba will face death unless her Afghan-born, American-raised lawyer, Yusuf, can uncover the events of that brutal day. Yet Zeba isn't talking - to reveal the truth might dishonour another and accusations of dishonour in Afghanistan mean harsh punishment. From its powerful opening pages, *A House Without Windows* transported me to modern-day Afghanistan and women thrown together by the rules and conventions of their homeland. An illuminating and heart-wrenching read.

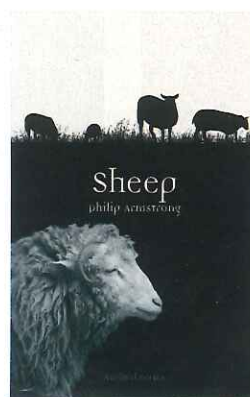


The House Between Tides by Sarah Maine, Allen & Unwin.

A graceful, gentle debut about a sense of place and belonging, in which the heroine is the rusted, boarded-up, "shipwreck" of a once grand dame, Muirlan House. Built between two tides ("an empty stretch of sand, which, for a few short hours joined Muirlan with the main island") off the west coast of Scotland, it was once home to famous fictional painter, Theo Blake. With thistles, wild roses, endangered birds and mythical "selkies" - human on land, but seals in water - Maine evokes the painter's eyrie hung with ethereal watery works. Her story is set in two distinct eras - 1910, when Theo and wife Beatrice take up residence in the then baronial seat and in 2010, when Harriet Devereaux decides to escape the London magazine world and make a go of her grandmother's inheritance. Hetty's plans to revamp the "Danger! Keep Out! No Trespassers!" monstrosity into an exclusive hotel, are badly received by locals. Her ancestors demolished traditional crofts to make way for the estate. Yet orphan Hetty feels a "dart of pleasure" when she sits with her new-found community of cousins.

Sheep by Philip Armstrong, NewSouth books.

The ancient Greeks dressed them in jackets, they've been symbolic for centuries, yet we malign sheep by using phrases such as "sheepishness" to describe guilt. Armstrong grew up in New Zealand in the '70s, when there were 30 sheep for every human, making him the ideal author for this handbook. "Sheep are hard to read," he observes, confessing their eyes leave him cold. Illustrated with paintings, sculptures and even sheep-shaped cauliflowers, anyone who has felt a whimsy for a cuddly lamb will not be disappointed. "A second sheep came up behind 'my sheep' and touched a nose to his rump, prompting him to turn and lay his chin over the dip in his companion's back. The gesture expresses what animal behaviourists call a 'bond'." They're also highly fashionable - Hermès is the god of shepherds.



Céleste by Roland Perry, ABC Books.

Roland Perry's last non-fiction biography, *The Queen, Her Lover And The Most Notorious Spy In History*, unrolled the scandalous story of Queen Victoria's secret affair at 15 with Lord John Elphinstone. In this, Perry's 30th book, he dallies with Mademoiselle Céleste Vénard. Carried, kicking, by her mother's lover to a Lyon brothel in 1832, at eight years old, at 15, Céleste was carted to Saint-Lazare women's prison for vagrancy. Credited with inventing the precursor to the can-can at dance halls, Céleste in very tight white britches and long black boots sold out - "Patrons rushed to buy front-row 'gynaecological' seats". Perry's pacing sets his books apart - "Countess" Céleste cantering full-pelt to marry the French consul-general in Australia, Lionel, Comte de Chabrilan. Her reputation scandalised Melbourne society.

