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## REVIEWS >



**The Fence**  
Meredith Jaffé  
Macmillan  
Stars: 4  
Reviewed by Thuy On  
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## The Fence (Meredith Jaffé, Macmillan)

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Septuagenarian Gwen and husband Eric are long-term residents of Green Valley Avenue, a quiet leafy corner in Sydney. When her beloved friend next-door dies, and her house is put on sale, Gwen is apprehensive about the incoming neighbours. And indeed first impressions and enduring interactions with the newbies are not favourable. Francesca and Brandon and their tribe of children (dazzlingly named Silver and Amber, Marigold and baby Bijoux) and dogs (Peanut and Butter) are noisy and destructive. But worse than that, for safety reasons Frankie and Brandy insist on the instalment of a fence between their two properties. Hitherto the two houses were separated by a row of trees, and Gwen, a keen gardener, believes the young upstarts are eco-terrorists, hell-bent on destroying her life's work but Frankie and Brandy think she's just an interfering busybody. *The Fence's* North Shore real estate squabbles are reminiscent of the fiction of Liane Moriarty, but Meredith Jaffé's debut explores a range of topics beyond mere border patrol disputes. Written with astute characterisation and alternating viewpoints so the reader can sympathise with both sides, *The Fence* also explores gender roles at home and work; marital and parental friction; the generational divide and the indignities of ageing. It's an engaging and satirical novel about the struggle of whether to preserve the past or look to the future.

*Thuy On is a Melbourne-based arts journalist and book reviewer and books editor of The Big Issue*

Category: [Reviews](#), [Reviews newsletter](#) [Book review list](#)



### Home

About  
Editorial contacts  
Editorial submissions  
Terms and conditions  
Privacy policy

### News

Local news  
International news  
Features  
Library news  
B+P announcements  
Notices  
Agency changes  
Moves/personnel  
Bestsellers  
Charts  
Events

### Reviews

View reviews  
Reviews rating system

### Jobs

View jobs  
Place a job ad

### Classifieds

View classifieds  
Place a classified

### Libraries

Library news  
Library news International

### Publications

Books+Publishing magazine  
Think Australian  
Newsletters

### Advertise

Place a classified or job ad  
Magazine or online display advertising

