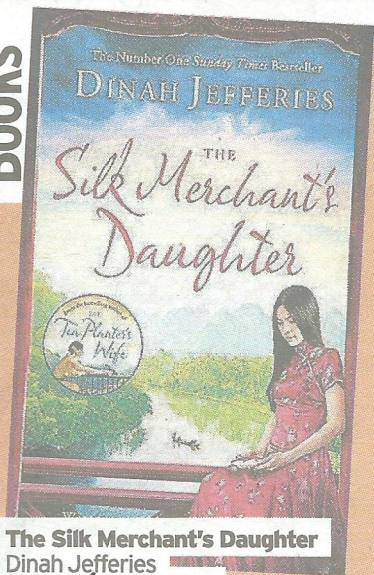


Books



The Silk Merchant's Daughter
 Dinah Jefferies
 Viking. Out Thursday

Last year's *The Tea Planter's Daughter* became a word-of-mouth bestseller, and fans will find just as much to enjoy in this follow-up - another historical epic with an exotic, colonial setting. This time we are in Hanoi in 1947, a city teetering on the brink of war as rebels conspire to end French rule.

Nicole, who is half-French, half-Vietnamese and turning 18, finds her comfortable existence threatened and her loyalties tested as she comes of age in a city that, like her family, is increasingly riven by tensions. Lush and romantic, with an authentic feeling of place and period, Jefferies should have another hit on her hands here.

DEIRDRE O'BRIEN