

Reviews of *Shadows of Olive Trees* by Susanne Gervay

This is the only book I've ever read many years ago that translated the second rise of feminism through the life of a Greek girl. It can apply to any ethnic group and stands as important feminist literature.

Erin JD Goodreads **5 stars**

Set in Sydney in the mid-70s, this is the story of Tessa, who must reconcile her Greek background with leaving school and the emergence of women's liberation. It is also a story of friendship and love, reminding me of *Looking for Alibrandi*. Gervay gets better with every book.

Spectrum Sydney Morning Herald.

Shadows of Olive Trees adds to our understanding of the difficulties of first, second and third generation migrants. The fact that this is a Greek family serves to contextualize the story but in no way makes it only appropriate to that cultural group. It is an important novel for the 'coming of age' or 'rites of passage' works which had a long tradition and a wide readership. It can also be said that the examination of the roles of young men and women as well as their parents within the particular social time is done with skill. The author provides a natural amplification of the 1970's with his the right amount of factual detail to make this period come alive. The universal theme, common to young adult novels, of gaining freedom and making choices is well treated and believable.

Susanne has cleverly created three female characters in Athena, Tessa and Jenny which are useful foils for one another. Each of these three characters undergoes development as a result of their relationships with men.

The most satisfying and well-defined character is Tessa, particularly in her growth and development over the three-year time frame. Her changing relationship with her parents, her brother Peter and the various friends at school and university.

Interestingly, Tessa's parents were sufficiently well rounded for the reader to empathize with their cultural background, their values, aspiration and actions This was quite an achievement given that we are to believe that Tessa is oppressed by her first generation Greek parents.

Professor Belle Alderman
University of Canberra, Australia

I thoroughly enjoyed 'Shadows of Olive Trees. Written by Susanne Gervay, *Shadows of Olive Trees* is set in the mid-1970's in the inner city of Sydney. It focuses on the emerging women's movement, along with the passions, laughter and complexity of young women searching for identity.

<https://www.megaessays.com/viewpaper/19626.html>

Tessa Kassis' gradual shift from good Greek daughter to beginner feminist, setting out on her own odyssey, is shown by a process of accumulation – a long series of short scenes, some mediated by an omniscient narrator's voice, some dialogue-based, some seen through Tessa consciousness but all of them contextualizing and balancing each other. Emotionally-charged incidents, such as Mr Kassis's outbursts of violence or Tessa's sense of being trapped into an arranged marriage, are given the same space as meetings of her creative writing group or the Easter services, which creates a sense of perspective and complexity without any overt editorializing from the writer.

It isn't easy to write convincingly about changes in consciousness but Gervay has done so, partly through this process of accumulation and partly through other strategies – letters from Tessa's friend Athena in Greece which highlight the changes in both young women; minor characters like Tessa's brother who go through their own changes; two major set pieces near the beginning and the end of the novel, the Easter services and a Christmas service, which mark the extent of Tessa's shift in values. Gervay's even tone encourages the reader to empathize with Tessa at each stage of the way. So there is no sense that Tessa is wrong at the beginning or right at the end, which is a testament both to the clarity of Gervay's conceptual underpinnings and her competence with style and structuring.

The novel has another dimension to it as well. While Tessa is certainly a unique individual, Gervay also suggests that her story is typical of the times by the use of reference points such as Germaine Greer's "The Female Eunuch", the first test tube baby and many other cultural indicators. To my knowledge this makes Gervay the first writer to reinterpret the lived experience of young women in the seventies for an audience of readers today – which in the light of recent media debates focussing the perceived differences between older and young feminists seems like a relevant and timely enterprise.

The novel makes a distinctive contribution to the body of creative work in this area.
University of Technology, Sydney

A tremendously passionate writer, Gervay has won many fans ... Gervay writes from the heart and often, about subjects with which she has had personal experience. *Spectrum*
Sydney Morning Herald

Susanne is one of Australia's most respected authors, writing about issues affecting women and children. *Sunday Telegraph*

www.sgervay.com
