

# WRITING\_\_WA.

# LOVE TO

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# READ LOCAL

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*The Art of Persuasion, Susan Midalia (Fremantle Press)*

## Summary

Susan Midalia's first novel and fourth book is a tender, smart and funny meditation on the ethics of reproduction, consumerism, conscience and political conviction. When twenty-five-year-old Hazel meets Adam and joins him in door knocking for the Greens, she thinks she knows her own mind. Hazel has opinions on everything, but Adam who is older, kinder than the boys she has gone out with, and sole parent to a 6-year-old-boy, is unimpressed. And Hazel badly wants to impress him.

Midalia engages the reader with warmth and wit, while never losing sight of the uncomfortable truths that haunt us as Western Australians. She writes about complicity and complacency, isolation and attachment, privilege and poverty, while making us care about her main characters as well as the sparkling supporting cast. This is a brilliant novel about what it means to live in our world as we do.

## About the author

Susan Midalia grew up in the Western Australian wheatbelt and has lived in Perth for most of her adult life. She is the author of three collections of short stories, all of which were shortlisted for major literary awards: *A History of the Beanbag*; *An Unknown Sky*; and *Feet to the Stars* (all published by UWA Publishing). She has a PhD in contemporary Australian women's writing and has degrees from both the University of Western Australia and Cambridge University. She has been the judge of several literary awards and retired

from teaching in 2007 to become a full-time writer and freelance editor. *The Art of Persuasion* is her first novel.

## Questions for discussion

- This novel carries a strong political message. Discuss the implications of a politicised novel and its impact.
- This is a very funny novel. The dialogue, the characters and the relationships between them are conveyed with wit, humour and sometimes, satire. Which scenes are the funniest and why?
- Hazel and Adam's love story appears, on the surface, to be a very modern dilemma, with its undercurrents of unemployment, single parenthood, bratty high schoolers and idealistic parents. What are your thoughts on how the love story plays out?
- How do Hazel and her friends and family enhance our understanding of contemporary Perth life?
- As a commentary on the state of our high schools, childcare, parenting and ethical politics, this novel is ambitious in its scope. Discuss your feelings about what the author is saying about these issues.
- Perth and its surrounds are central to the story as the characters take trains, walk and drive through suburban Perth. What is the importance of this sun- and sea-filled landscape to the story, and why do you think the author has 'centred' this place, our city, instead of another?
- The novel's central character is a strong, funny, educated and ethical young woman. She does not fit the stereotype of the lazy millennial, nor does she conform to the expectations of her parents' generation. Do you think of Hazel as a feminist? What evidence from the novel made you form this opinion?
- Amanda Curtin has described *The Art of Persuasion* as a 'modern love story with the feel of a comedy of manners from another time' (1). Do you agree with this statement and how do you think this modern love story relates to another time?
- Susan Midalia herself speaks of being extremely moved when viewing the memorial to the SIEV X on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin (2). This memorial was constructed after a boat carrying asylum seekers capsized, killing 353 people; a tragedy that the government at the time largely ignored. Discuss this angle.

References

Curtin, A. (2018, Mar 23) Susan Midalia talks about The Art of Persuasion.  
Retrieved from <https://amandacurtin.com/2018/03/23/susan-midalia-talks-about-the-art-of-persuasion/>  
Curtin, A. (2018, Mar 23) Susan Midalia talks about The Art of Persuasion.  
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*A History of the Beanbag, An Unknown Sky and Feet to the Stars*, Susan Midalia (UWA Publishing)

*Afternoons with Harvey Beam*, Carrie Cox (Fremantle Press)

*The Break*, Deb Fitzpatrick (Fremantle Press)

*Drawing Sybilla*, Odette Kelada (UWA Publishing)

*A Kiss from Mr Fitzgerald*, Natasha Lester (Hachette Australia)

*Elsewhere in Success*, Iris Lavell (Fremantle Press)