

Us, In Between

Julya Rabinowich

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Featured in
The Goethe Institut Litrix
Programme

Potential translation
funding from
the Goethe Institut and / or
the Austrian Federal Ministry
for Arts, Culture, the Civil
Service and Sport.

Featured in resources for
the Queen's College
Translation Exchange (QTE)

A powerful novel discussing the rise of xenophobia in Europe and encouraging young people to stand in solidarity with refugees

About the author

Julya Rabinowich is a writer, columnist, playwright, painter and interpreter. She was born in St. Petersburg in 1970 and in 1977, her family moved to Vienna in an experience she refers to as having been “uprooted and repotted”. Julya has worked with people seeking asylum and victims of torture at the Integrationshaus Wien and the Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst in Vienna. In 2016, *Dazwischen: ich* was released, the first of four novels for young adults. This novel won the Friedrich Gerstäcker Prize and the Austrian Children’s Book Prize. The English translation, *Me, In Between*, was published by Andersen Press in 2021, translated by Claire Storey. Rabinowich is an outspoken defender of human rights and is a board member of the recently founded PEN Berlin.

About the translator

Claire Storey is a literary translator working from Spanish and German into English. She translates for adults and children, but has a particular interest in YA and MG. Claire is co-editor of **World Kid Lit**, highlighting the importance of books in translation for young readers. In 2021/22, Claire received funding from Arts Council England for a project focussing on YA Literature from Latin America. She has been a speaker at the YA Lit Con, the Bookseller Children's Conference and the YA Studies Association Conference. Claire is involved with her local refugee solidarity group and would love to take these books into schools and talk to young people.

Publishing Rights

World English language rights available.

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Financial Assistance to Aid Translation

The book has been included in the Litrix programme from the Goethe Institut. While funding is not guaranteed they would welcome an application. From the New Books in German website:

The Goethe-Institut website gives further information on the process, including details of forthcoming deadlines and decision dates. The page also links to the online application portal. The Goethe-Institut advises people to apply early.

Generally, 40%-60% of the total translation fee is covered. There is a maximum payment of 8,000 Euros per book.

If you want to discuss your application before filling the form in, or have any questions, you are very welcome to contact the Goethe Institut employees listed at the following links:

Goethe-Institut London -

<https://www.goethe.de/ins/gb/en/kul/ser/uef.html>

Goethe-Institut New York -

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There may also be options available for funding through the Austria Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport.

Applications are processed by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport

Applications for children's books should be made in good time before the book goes to print.

For more information or for assistance with the application form please contact:

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Overview

Written from the perspective of Madina, a teenage refugee, **Us, In Between** is the sequel to the 2022 YA novel **Me, In Between**. Book one followed Madina's family as they fled from war, arriving in an unnamed European country where they are awaiting their asylum decision. In **Us, In Between**, the family has received their leave to remain and are beginning a new life. The focus broadens to include the rise of right-wing xenophobia in Madina's community, with small words and actions culminating in an explosive attack on Madina's family. While ultimately, it is Madina and her family who are at the centre of the racist abuse, other immigrant families are also targeted.

Why This Book?

In the UK, we continue to witness attacks on asylum seekers and people seeking refuge. Recent headlines and plans by the government to "prevent illegal immigration", or "send people back" highlights the xenophobic and racist elements of our society. Incidents like the attack in Knowsley reveal how words from leaders and disquiet in communities can lead to cruel violence against so-called outsiders. **Us, In Between** does not shy away from addressing this topic and helps young people to recognise the relationships between jealousy, anger and mob violence. It also calls on young people to stand in solidarity with refugees and to speak out.

I truly believe that this book could be used in schools and with groups of older children to discuss events in our society and help them understand the world around them from a compassionate point of view.

Rabinowich is also working on book three in which Madina is triggered by events unfolding in elsewhere, inspired by the war in Ukraine. .

"There are those who are attacked, those who stand in solidarity and there are those who remain silent. Those who remain silent are complicit. Perhaps this book will help to give people courage, to help them search out allies. Perhaps it will move people to become allies. But above all, I wanted to lay bare the mechanisms that lie behind escalation: it begins with tiny steps, before suddenly flaring up. It starts with words, but it doesn't remain just words. We see this so often in the world, how the clockwork is set in motion. Isn't it about time that we learnt from it? Dividing people is easy. Bringing people together is more difficult because it is reliant on compromise. The easiest solution is rarely the best." **Julya Rabinowich, The Austrian Riveter, April 2023**

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Praise for **Me, In Between**

...a serious contender for one the best books of this new year – Irish Times, January 2022

"We love [Me, In Between] and will continue to recommend it to older readers ... by including it on our Recommended Reads lists for students in Years 10 and 11" - Vicki Bennett, Adviser, School Library Service, Hampshire

Longlisted for the Redbridge Children's Book Award 2023

It may well be that translator Claire Storey's skilful idiom plays a considerable part in making this challenging story readily accessible to UK readers. Unless they have direct knowledge of immigrant experience, they will surely learn much about what 'not belonging' feels like for someone around their own age; living in confined, even squalid circumstances, with very limited cash, no support from an extended family, maybe with the threat of being returned to the chaos of a war zone. Perhaps, like Madina, it may even mean watching the parents they have loved and trusted disintegrating in front of them – Books for Keeps, May 2022

Read an interview between me and Julya Rabinowich about her work. Featured in the Austrian Riveter from the European Literature Network: "Madina says she comes from everywhere; she is the archetypal young woman fleeing war, a great representative of those children caught between two worlds."

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Themes

In addition to the topic of xenophobia and racism, the following themes are also discussed.

War

About two thirds of the way through the book, Madina receives a telephone call from the authorities saying that they have her grandmother. Madina hasn't seen her since they left their homeland. How has she made the journey to find them? They are reunited and her grandmother tells her story. At the end of the previous book, Madina's father left to return to his homeland at his mother's request, to offer himself to the soldiers in exchange for his brother. When he gets there, he makes plans for his mother to flee should he not return. He hands himself in on the promise that his brother will be returned. His brother does not come back - both of them have now been taken. The plans he has made for his elderly mother are set in motion and she is transported to where Madina and her family are. Her grandmother comes to live with them, but they receive no further news of Madina's father or uncle. They have to accept they may never see them again.

Madina has flashbacks to the war, of helping her father with his patients. There are sections written in italics, which relate to Madina's dreams or nightmares, often about her father, or increasingly about the hostile situation she finds herself in.

Mental Health

Madina's mother is struggling with depression, sitting for long periods of time at the table in her nightwear. She has no drive to get up and go. Madina finds this frustrating and tries her best to engage her mum, encouraging her to seek help. Ultimately though, Madina's mum has to want to do it herself. With the help and support of the people around her, particularly Amina (Madina's Aunt), she does. She begins to learn German and to look forward to a new life.

In book one, we learn that Amina rubs her skin raw in the shower, trying to overcome her experiences back home. After talking to the authorities and receiving their right to remain, Amina is now coping better. She is embracing her new country and language and appears to have a new-found confidence. She still sometimes comes out of the shower red raw but less often than before. She has found strength within.

In book one, Madina's friend Laura told us about the domestic abuse her family experienced at the hands of her father. Laura's mother, Susi, continues to drink.

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Relationships, including LGBTQ+

Madina and Markus (Laura's sister) are going out together, but with strict rules from Madina's mum. Markus wants more but Madina feels unable to give that. Madina realises it isn't really working but doesn't want to hurt Markus. Markus is in his final year at school and is considering moving away for university. Madina sees that this is a great opportunity for Markus and recognises that it will probably be the end for them as a couple, but that is fine. They will remain friends.

Madina is suspicious when Laura appears to be hiding something from her. She's convinced Laura has a new boyfriend, could it even be the honker - the guy in the car who keeps beeping his horn at them? But Laura won't tell her, so one day when Madina chances upon Laura's open diary, she can't resist reading it. She discovers Laura has been meeting a girl, Sophie. When they do eventually have it out, Madina tells Laura: "I really don't care ... You're you, and I'm me ... it's a relationship like any other." And just as Laura's previous relationships with boys, this one also fizzles out.

Dogs

Rabinowich loves her own dog, and in this story, Laura and Madina are desperate for a puppy. They wear Laura's mum down to the point that she allows them to get a puppy as long as they take on the responsibility for him. Throughout the story, the puppy supports the family's wellbeing, recognising when someone is scared or sad and comforting them when they need it.

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Review

**By Silvia Schwab, Austrian Radio Journalist
Published on the Litrix Programme website**

Keep looking forwards, never look back

In 2016, Austrian author, translator and columnist Julya Rabinowich became an overnight hit with the appearance of her first novel for younger readers: *Dazwischen: Ich* (Me, In Between). Six years later and Rabinowich's sequel to *Dazwischen: Ich* has recently been published: *Dazwischen: Wir* (Us: In Between). Once again, we find ourselves discussing children's literature of the highest calibre.

If *Dazwischen: Ich* passed you by, you are missing a treat, but you do not need to have read the first book in order to immerse yourself in the second. Rabinowich artfully weaves in important information from the first book, almost as sidenotes in the form of letters, memories and dreams. Little by little, this brings you up to speed with what has happened since Madina's family made their dangerous journey to flee their homeland.

For over two years, the teenager has been living in central Europe with her mother, brother and aunt. Where she comes from isn't important. The foursome now has an apartment, good friends and are living in safety. Their life in the refugee hostel with its many restrictions remains just an unpleasant memory. Madina even starts to feel settled at school. It could all be so good, except that her dad is still missing in the war, her mum is struggling with depression, and more and more radical right-wing supporters are spreading unease throughout their small town.

Madina has mastered the new language better than the rest of her family and so it falls to her to become their manager. Sometimes it all runs smoothly and she's proud of her situation, content with the many freedoms she is afforded, especially compared with her life back home. But she is often overwhelmed: it is Madina who is called upon to handle issues concerning her mother and younger brother, to stand up against racist hostilities as well as dealing with her own disturbing trauma. The war she fled with her family was horrific and as her father was a medic, she witnessed far too much.

Julya Rabinowich sensitively describes her sporty, intelligent protagonist, suggestive of the fact that she has bitter first-hand experiences of migration and the feeling of being foreign in a new land. But Madina does not give up; she wants to "keep looking forwards, never look back." Veering between happiness and anger, joy and doubt, she has been forced to grow up far too quickly.

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Madina's diary forms the structure of the novel, and so we find ourselves directly connected to her heart and mind, witnessing first-hand her courage and her dreams, her worries and her desires. Emotional, yet never maudlin, poetic but never pathetic, often serious and in turns ironic, the young woman describes the ups and downs of a difficult yet beautiful year.

The author has purposefully left the exact location of the novel unsaid. And it is really irrelevant whether that is Austria or Germany. Either way, the cultural differences are significant, seeping through into her daily life, from her skin colour, to her clothes, to the missing words in her vocabulary and her mother's lack of independence. In many countries, this novel will be particularly poignant, as people with harrowing experiences of war and the need to flee arrive in new countries. In 2022, this feels even more so, as the war in Ukraine affects people across Europe.

With its plain, concise language, sensitive structures and impressive imagery, this novel present translators with certain challenges. For Madina, the writing itself becomes a tight grip on the search for her own path, and a large dose of empathy, precision and the feel for the language will be required to convey this.

While there are numerous books for young people about immigration, foreignness and xenophobia, Jula Rabinowich's books stand out with their empathetic yet defiant descriptions of a life "In Between". Even the supple voice falls in between, carefully balanced between power and insecurity, courage and timidity. We would love to find out how Madina and her family get on during the next school year!

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