

I'm Not Going Anywhere. Rumena Bužarovska. Deep Vellum Publishing, 2023.
Notes for Book Club meeting “Beyond Borders.” Tempe Public Library, March 13 2023.
Prepared by Keith Brown, keith_brown@asu.edu (underscore between Keith and Brown)

Rumena Buzarovska is a Professor of American Literature at the University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, the capital of the Republic of North Macedonia. In 2016 Rumena was named one of the New Voices from Europe by Literary Europe Live and received the Edo Budiša award in Croatia. She is a 2018 fellow of the International Writing Program in Iowa and a 2022 fellow of the Landys and Gyr Stiftung in Switzerland. She is also a literary translator and a social commentator.

Her book of short stories, *My Husband* was published in translation in January 2020. *I'm Not Going Anywhere* will be published in the US in English translation by 2023: Rumena worked with Steve Bradbury on the translation.

In a reading at Changing Hands Bookstore in Tempe on 1 March 2023, Rumena shared three excerpts with the audience:

From “Blackberries,” pp.38-41

From “I’m Not Going Anywhere,” pp.103-105

From “8th March,” pp.184-185.

In each of these passages, the protagonists (a young mother, revisiting her family’s country cottage; a former emigrant who has returned, divorced, to Skopje from Australia to live with his ageing mother; and a university professor, recalling the glimpse of life in the US that she had enjoyed as a visiting scholar) contrast their own fate to what might have been, if they had been luckier, less risk-averse, or more independent from relatives or spouses.

Rumena spoke at the reading about the phrase “to manage” which recurs in the first passage, and the context for the book, where many people in North Macedonia see better prospects outside the country.

She spoke also about writing a male character (Riste), and writing about bodies with close attention to the grotesque. She describes seeing the grotesque as a way to engage different kinds of emotions in writing, including different registers of humor.

In the final short story, “8th of March” (International Women’s Day, widely celebrated in former communist and socialist East Europe), Vesna is invited to the US Embassy for a meet and greet for “powerful women.” Rumena discussed how details of this story—most centrally, the US Ambassador’s wife’s outreach to arrange skits—are based in fact, and drive a commentary on the power relations between the US and North Macedonia, which can seem like a throwback to colonialism.

What passages, characters, or themes had the biggest impact, or raised the biggest questions, for you, reading *I'm Not Going Anywhere*?