

The Translator

By Leila Aboulela

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American readers were introduced to the award-winning Sudanese author Leila Aboulela with *Minaret*, a delicate tale of a privileged young African Muslim woman adjusting to her new life as a maid in London. Now, for the first time in North America, we step back to her extraordinarily assured debut about a widowed Muslim mother living in Aberdeen who falls in love with a Scottish secular academic. Sammar is a Sudanese widow working as an Arabic translator at a Scottish university. Since the sudden death of her husband, her young son has gone to live with family in Khartoum, leaving Sammar alone in cold, gray Aberdeen, grieving and isolated. But when she begins to translate for Rae, a Scottish Islamic scholar, the two develop a deep friendship that awakens in Sammar all the longing for life she has repressed. As Rae and Sammar fall in love, she knows they will have to address his lack of faith in all that Sammar holds sacred. An exquisitely crafted meditation on love, both human and divine, *The Translator* is ultimately the story of one woman's courage to stay true to her beliefs, herself, and her newfound love.

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The Translator By Leila Aboulela Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Sammar, a young Sudanese widow, is working as a translator in a Scottish university when love blossoms between herself and her Scottish supervisor, Rae Isles, a scholar of the Middle East and of Third World politics. A religious Muslim who covers her hair, Sammar has left her young son in Khartoum to be raised by her aunt and quells her loneliness by throwing herself into her job translating terrorist documents for kindly divorcé Rae. The two signal their growing love for one another with sympathy (and chastity). On the eve of her trip to Khartoum to see her son and bring him back with her, she confronts Rae, desperate to know if he will accept Islam—since a relationship to her is impossible without marriage, and that marriage is impossible without his conversion. His hesitation reveals the cultural gulf between them, and Sammar is pierced to the quick. Though *The Translator* is Aboulela's second novel to be released in the U.S., it is the Sudanese-British author's first, published in the U.K. in 1999. (Her third, *Minaret*, appeared here last year.) With authentic detail and insight into both cultures, Aboulela painstakingly constructs a truly transformative denouement. *(Oct.)*
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From Booklist
Aboulela's debut novel, the second to be published in the U.S., touches on themes of culture shock, religious fervor, loneliness, loss, and love, each illuminated by her lyrical yet understated writing style, and her uncanny ability to capture a fleeting moment with photographic precision. Sammar, a young Sudanese widow, leaves her 4-year-old son with her aunt and returns to Scotland, where her husband died, and where she works as an Arabic translator. She begins translating for Rae, a Scottish Islamic scholar, and their work relationship gradually becomes a tentatively romantic one. But Aboulela has left subtle but frequent hints of how important Sammar's faith is to her--prayer bringing her "something deeper than happiness"--so it comes as no surprise that Rae's inability to profess his faith in her religion, in which he is so intellectually engaged, causes her to flee. Aboulela's perceptive description of Sammar's aching loss of both Rae and her profession leaves an indelible impression, as does the conclusion of this beautifully crafted novel. *Deborah Donovan*
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About the Author
Leila Aboulela was born in 1964 and grew up in Khartoum, learning English at an American primary school and later at The Sisters' School, a private Catholic school. She took a degree in Economics at the University of Khartoum and then travelled to Britain to study for an M.Sc. in Statistics at the London School of Economics. In 1990 she moved to Scotland with her husband and their three children. She started writing in 1992 while lecturing in Statistics and working as a part-time Research Assistant. Her first stories were broadcast on BBC Radio and an anthology Coloured Lights was published by Polygon in 2001. The Translator was first published to critical acclaim in 1999. It was long-listed for the Orange Prize 2000 and also long-listed for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Awards 2001. Leila Aboulela won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000 for 'The Museum', published in Heinemann's short-story collection, Opening Spaces.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jane Nelsen:

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