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# 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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Review

'A story of love and faith all the more moving for the restraint with which it is written' J.M. Coetzee'A lyrical journey about exile, loss and love... poetry in motion' The Sunday Times'She pulls you into her world as she refracts British life, its smells and sounds, its advertisements and turns of phrase.' Independent'An exceptionally well-crafted and beautifully written novel' The Guardian

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