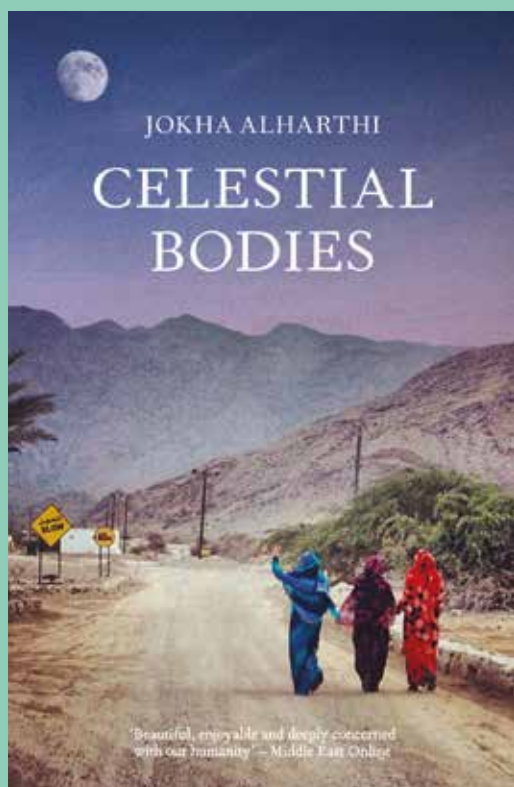




Reader's Guide



Celestial Bodies Jokha Alharthi

Translated by Marilyn Booth

Sandstone Press

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About the author	Jokha Alharthi was born in Oman in July 1978. She is the author of two previous collections of short fiction, a children's book, and three novels in Arabic. Fluent in English, she completed a PhD in Classical Arabic Poetry in Edinburgh, and teaches at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat. She has been shortlisted for the Sahikh Zayed Award for Young Writers and her short stories have been published in English, German, Italian, Korean, and Serbian. She lives in Oman.
About the translator	Marilyn Booth was born in Boston, USA in February 1955. She holds the Khalid bin Abdallah Al Saud Chair for the Study of the Contemporary Arab World, Oriental Institute and Magdalen College, Oxford. In addition to her academic publications, she has translated many works of fiction from Arabic, most recently, <i>The Penguin's Song</i> and <i>No Road to Paradise</i> , both by Lebanese novelist Hassan Daoud. She lives in Oxford.
About the book	<i>Celestial Bodies</i> is set in the village of al-Awafi in Oman, where we encounter three sisters: Mayya, who marries Abdallah after a heartbreak; Asma, who marries from a sense of duty; and Khawla who rejects all offers while waiting for her beloved, who has emigrated to Canada. These three women and their families witness Oman evolve from a traditional, slave-owning society which is slowly redefining itself after the colonial era, to the crossroads of its complex present. Elegantly structured and taut, it tells of Oman's coming-of-age through the prism of one family's losses and loves.
What the judges thought	'A richly imagined, engaging and poetic insight into a society in transition and into lives previously obscured.'
Discussion points	<p>The novel is set in the fictional village of al-Awafi – how well does the author create a sense of place and make the village seem real?</p> <p>The story focuses on the relationship choices of three sisters – does it seem that any of them actually have free choice, or are limited by the society they live in?</p> <p>What did you learn about Omani culture? Was there anything that surprised you about the way of life there?</p> <p>The author has a PhD in Classical Arabic Poetry – do you feel the influence of this in her writing style?</p>
Themed reading	<p><i>The English Girl</i> by Katherine Webb Joan has arrived in the ancient city of Muscat with her fiancé, Rory. It is her lifelong dream to discover this place, but Oman is a land lost in time, and not welcoming to female visitors. When she befriends pioneering explorer Maude Vickery, their relationship will change them both.</p> <p><i>The Turtle of Oman</i> by Naomi Shihab Nye Aref Al-Amri doesn't want to leave Oman. He doesn't want to leave his school, his friends, or his beloved grandfather, Siddi. He doesn't want to live in Michigan, where his parents will go to graduate school. To help him say goodbye, Siddi takes him on a series of adventures, collecting mementos of home.</p> <p><i>Maryam: Keeper of Stories</i> by Alawiya Sobh Set during the Lebanese Civil War, the novel offers a rare depiction of women's experiences during conflict. The details of everyday life mix with female voices from across classes, sects, and generations, and balance simmering tension with the sweetness of living.</p> <p><i>Earth Weeps, Saturn Laughs</i> by Abdulaziz Al Farsi This is the story of Khalid Bakhit, a government employee, who moves back to his hometown in Oman after a time away in the big city. His return reveals to him that some long-established traditions have a stranglehold on the town: from racial prejudice, to religious bigotry, to outdated patterns of leadership.</p> <p><i>The Inheritance</i> by Sahar Khalifeh This powerful novel examines the stark realities in the lives of Palestinian women. Zeynab, born to an American mother and a Palestinian father, has the disorienting experience of living between two worlds, while searching for her own identity. A search for identity that mirrors the Palestinians' own quest for nationhood.</p>
Useful links	<p>Blogger Review of <i>Celestial Bodies</i></p> <p>Website of Jokha Alharthi</p> <p>Short Story by Jokha Alharthi in <i>Arabic Literature Today</i></p> <p>Review of <i>Celestial Bodies</i> in <i>The Wee Review</i></p> <p>Video review of <i>Celestial Bodies</i></p>