



# Breaking Knees: Modern Arabic Short Stories from Syria

*Zakaria Tamer*

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## **Breaking Knees: Modern Arabic Short Stories from Syria** Zakaria Tamer

The first of Zakaria Tamer's collections of stories to be published in English as a complete unit, "Breaking Knees" is a daring work of art that deals with taboo subjects like religion and sexuality in a frank manner and expresses an urgently felt need for change. The general theme of "Breaking Knees", as of much of Tamer's work, is repression: of the individual by the institutions of state and religion and of individuals by each other, particularly women by men. Thus the question of authority - political, social, sexual and religious - forms the thematic core of the book, with (female) sexuality receiving the lion's share of concern. Political authority is manifest in the emphasis in many stories on the machinations of the police state - arbitrary arrest and detention, interrogations, corruption. Social authority expresses itself in the patriarchal cultural order and dominance of religious and cultural institutions and conventions that constrain individual freedom. Many stories stress religious hypocrisy and the unfilled sexual expectations of women. In bringing together religion, politics and sexuality (sometimes all three in the same story), the author is telling us indirectly that these forms of oppression are all connected. From the perspective of the countless Arab individuals who have adopted modern values based on democratic institutions and human rights, the state of affairs characterized by political and cultural stagnation, a destructive worship of tradition and a glorification of a mythical past, appears truly dire.

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