

and surreal nightmare, quite apt to engender a prose which is as captivating as the rich chemistry of everyday life, of hardship and happiness, delight and sorrow, birth and death.

That is how Zakaria Tamer began a choice in short story writing which was soon to drastically distinguish him from the major short story writers in Syria at the epoch, such as Abdul-Salam al-Ojeili, Ulfat Idlibi, Abdullah Abd, George Salem, Said Houraniyeh, and Haseeb Kayyali. His short story, moreover, was also 'dissident', one should say, in comparison with the rules and guidelines which the great masters of short story writers in Egypt, the likes of Yusuf Idris, Yahya Haqqi, or Naguib Mahfouz, established and enforced. Thus, in 1950s, it was unconventional for a young writer to begin a short story, already titled "The Neighing of the White Horse", by such a sentence:

The chamber of the tired man is lightless, silent, dark, a small box of soaked stone, to which I return with no longing, after having drifted for hours across streets drowned in shimmering lights of shop façades on both sides, and the neon advertising signs of different colours. The night, then, was a coarse, scorching, long song, in whose gloomy caves a spring tenderness and a wilderness of a starved tiger were embracing each other, while I was a blind old bat, with broken wings. Can't find my bread and my joy. Not recognizing my bread and my joy.*

Likewise, at that period, and within socio-cultural contexts which would be suspicious of literary experimentation in general, and would in particular prefer simplified language in narration and short story, it was curious for Tamer, a young writer, to pick "A Coarse Blue Song" as a title for an indeed short short story, given how size was crucial in validating the genre at the time. Furthermore, the first sentence would flow as freely poetical as no Arab storytelling ever dared:

The river of human creatures roamed for a long time across wide streets immersed in vivid sunshine, where stone buildings are proud of their dwellers, made of white tender cotton, well compressed in a superb mould. The river zigzagged along white alleys and among mud houses overcrowded with yellow faces and rugged hands, and there the river's flow intermingled with blood and tears and suppurations from eter-