At the beginning of the new millennium Muhammad Khudayyir (b. 1942) establishes a dialogue with the Spanish painter Goya, admiring the mixture of ‘irony and empathy’ with which Goya depicts humanity. Goya’s treatment of war and violence resonates profoundly with the Iraqi writer, who was born and has spent his whole life in the war-torn city of Basra. Of all the possible turning points in recent Arab history (e.g. 1948, 2001 and 2003), it can be argued that the year 1967, the year of the Arab debacle in the Six-Day War with Israel, is the year when a certain project of Arab modernity came to an end and ‘the contemporary’ came into being. Khudayyir is a quintessential post-1967 Arab writer, even though his fiction is unlike anything else in contemporary Arabic literature and its difficulty has meant few critics have discussed it in detail. In our paper we discussed the development of Khudayyir’s fiction by focusing on the various ways in which he represents war, which we take to be a major element of the Iraqi and Arab contemporaries. His unconventional technique and increasingly original concept of narrative fiction make him stand out from his peers. However, our discussion also aimed to show how Khudayyir can be defined as a representative figure of the contemporary in Arab culture and literature. Since the 1980s the novel has been the prevalent genre in Arab fiction but Khudayyir has written exclusively short texts: short stories, building on the established tradition, and increasingly hybrid texts informed by the older Arab tradition (written and oral), and the work of writers and artists from outside the Arab world. Similarly, while exile is the condition of the great majority of Iraqi writers today, Khudayyir rarely leaves Basra, although has frequently experienced various forms of internal exile, and in this disconnection of his he fits Agamben’s definition of the truly contemporary.