**Summary**

**Yūsuf al-Khāl** was a Lebanese poet and writer, born in 1917 in Syria. He graduated in 1944 from the Philosophy Department at the American University of Beirut where he taught Arabic literature. In 1948 he went to America where he was in full touch with renewal literary circles. In 1955, he came back to Lebanon with well-conceived purpose of heralding a second Arab poetic renaissance. In 1957, he founded *Shi‘r* which ran till 1964, then from 1967 to 1967. *Shi‘r* was the most professional avant-garde Arabic magazine dedicated to poetry. Through it, he took pain to support the new production that tried to find a path in experimentation; that is change the poetic language making it closer to the spoken language in the lexicon, structures and music; make accessible modernity to the Arab reader through translations of foreign experiences; renew the themes of poetry by expressing a personal experience able to enrich the human experience. Although he published several works (novel, play, poetry, essays and translations) till his death in 1987, posterity recognizes him above all as the leader of the modernist *Shi‘r* movement.

**Main entry**

**Yūsuf al-Khāl** was born in 1917 in the village of ͑Amār al-Ḥiṣn in Syria. He attended religious schools there, then in Miḥrada nearby Ḥamā where his father, ͑Abd-Allāh al-Khāl, served as a clergyman.

**Forming**

In 1930, his family moved to Tripoli (Lebanon). There, he graduated in 1934 from the American School by winning the first Price with a text headed “*āmālī fī-l-mustaqbal*” (My wishes in the future), particularly hailed by the local newspaper *al-Shabᾱb*. That year, not only he left the family protection and the school benches for embracing the career of journalist (mainly in the magazine *al-Makshῡf*), but he also secretly joined the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), and began writing in its mouthpiece, the daily *al-Nahḍa*, with Fu’ād Sulayman (1912-51). Out of this purely intellectual activism, he wrote his first and last novel, *Salmāya*, whose dedication unveils the great admiration he had for the leader of the SSNP, Anṭūn Sa ͑āda (1904-49).

During the World War II, he went back to studies at the Aleppo American University; then he held a teaching position of Arabic literature at the University of Fine Arts in Sidon. From 1942 to 1944, he studied at the Philosophy Department of the American University of Beirut (AUB) where he graduated in 1944. There, he joined the Arabic philosophical League (*al-Rābiṭa l-falsafiyya l-ʿarabiyya*), founded by the head of the department, Charles Mālik (1906-87) who he greatly admired as professor and thinker. This period yielded to him philosophical achievements that laid the foundations of his conception of freedom in terms of thought, of the individual’s inborn rights and of politics, as well as of his faith in a free and independent Lebanon, which was contrary to the idea of Greater Syria advocated by the SSNP.

**Earlier reformist tendencies**

In 1944, he taught at the AUB International College, then at the AUB School of fine Arts and Sciences. In the same period, he published his first poetry collection, *al-Ḥurriyya*. In 1946-47, he left teaching to become editor in chief of the magazine *Ṣawt al-mar’a* (Woman’s Voice), founded by the Lebanese Women Association. He was actually very sensitive to promote rising woman education level and her emancipation.

In 1947, while he was at the AUB, he made public in *al-Nahār* his decision to leave the SSNP. However, he was still soaked by its cultural vision, well expressed in the essay of Anṭūn Saʿāda, *al-Ṣirāʿ al-fikrī fī l-adab al-sūrī* (The Struggle of the Intellect in Syrian Literature), stressing philosophy, social sciences, geographical environment and secularization role in the society development.

From his earliest publications (1934-48), he considered freedom cause as a prerequisite condition to self-rewarding and, hence, build a modern society. He defended the Arabs’ entrance into History and their participation on equal terms in building the nowadays creeping global civilization.

**The American interval**

From 1948 to 1955, al-Khāl lived in New York where he worked as an expert in the UN English edition magazine, and subsequently, as Press attaché of the UN General Committee of Libya preparing for independence. This position allowed him to meet with interest and admiration literary circles and renewal figures in America and Europe. And, when his mission came to an end, he became editor in chief of the Lebanese New-Yorker newspaper *al-Hudā* which printed his play *Hīrūdyā*. This rich period was intellectually instructive for his subsequent carrier of managing editor and publisher.

During his stay in America he was particularly sensitive to the experience of Thomas Stearns Eliot and Ezra Pound, and, mainly, to the activity of the magazine *Poetry*, which had a decisive role in the renewal of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

**Genesis of *Shiʿr* (Poetry)**

Haunted by modernism issues, and anxious to see Arabic literature reach the world level, al-Khāl left in 1955 America to Lebanon to be editor in chief of the magazine *al-Ṣayyād*, and then of *al-Nahār* culture page. The quest for possible ways for a second Arab renaissance (*nahḍa*) marked his column "*Min zāwiyatī* (From my point of view)". He signed it with the pseudonym Luqyān, inspired by Lucian (192-125 BC), known for his bold social critique and his satirical style. He particularly emphasized the highly controversial book of Anīs Frayḥa, *Naḥwa ʿarabiyya muyassara* (Towards simplified Arabic [language]), that he considered as a decisive solution to one of the main problems of the modern Arab individual**.** He was actually convinced that the salvation laid in changing the Arabic language, making it closer to the spoken language in the lexicon, structures and music.

At the same time, he taught again at the AUB where he developed acutely aware of the huge gap between Arab poetic delay and American and European progress. He tried to educate his students and his entourage to the need of reviving Arab poetry, freeing it from the constraints that prevented it from being in tune with its time, and move forward.

In the autumn 1956, the core of the magazine *Shiʿr* started taking shape (Adonis, Unsī l-Ḥājj, Shawqī Abū Shaqrā, Fu'ād Rifqa, ‘Iṣām Maḥfūz among others). The broad-lines were already laid down, especially through a key speech that Yūsuf al-Khāl delivered on January 31, 1957 at the Lebanese Cenacle (*al-nadwa l-lubnāniyya*), entitled "*Mustaqbal al- shiʿr fī Lubnān* (the future of poetry in Lebanon)’’. And, when the first issue of *Shiʿr* appeared in the winter 1957, he decided to dedicate himself professionally to its own quarterly magazine *Shi ͑r*.

***Shiʿr* adventure (1957-70)**

*Shi ͑r* actually ran from 1957 to 1970, with an interruption in 1964, and resumption in 1967, thanks to the support of Unsī al-Ḥājj and *dār al-Nahār li l-nashr* for which al-Khāl was editor in chief.

For eleven years (8+3), and through forty four issues (32+12), *Shi ͑r* proved to be an important **forum** for both emerging and established Arab poets, and a **laboratory** making accessible modernity to the Arab reader through translations of foreign contemporary poetry (Ezra Pound, T. E. Eliot, Galway Kinnel, Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Salvatore Quasimodo, André Breton, Louis Aragon, Yves Bonnefoy, among many others). Al-Khāl took pain to encourage a new generation of Arab poets, especially those who used to write free verses and prose poems. His credo was to unfetter the Arab literature of its traditional conception and its conventional thematic schemes, and to unchain the Arabic poetry from its outdated prosody. *Shi ͑r* was an **observatory** aiming at reviewing the Arab cultural heritage from the inside, and to link the Arab culture future to its creative interaction with the human civilization.

**A modernist project**

*Shi ͑r* was conceived and directed as an instrument of a full-fledged revolution against conservatism in literature as well as in the intellectual thought. In the glittering literary and artistic life in Beirut of the years sixties, *Shi ͑r* emerged undisputedly as a central cultural **institution**. Al-Khāl gathered around his forward-looking magazine a broad network of five prestigious vehicles: the newspaper ***al-Nahār***, through its cultural page that was being edited by one of the most active and radical protagonists of *Shi ͑r*, Unsī al-Ḥājj (1937-2014); the literary clique of “***Khamīs majallat Shiʿr***” (Thursday’s *Shi ͑r*), which represented a strong voice in the local and regional press; the publishing house, ***Dār majallat Shi ͑r***, established in 1958, through which al-Khāl promoted and disseminated modernist Arabic poetry (especially Arabic prose poems collections of Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ, and Unsī al-Ḥājj), anthologies of foreign contemporary poetry (including the one by himself on American poetry), and essays on the modern conception of poetry; **the magazine *Adab*** (Literature) that he launched in 1962 in order to extend the spirit of *Shi ͑r* to other fields of literature (short novels, essays, theater, fine arts, medias, society…) ; and ***Gallery One***, which he founded in 1963 to spread *Shi ͑r* movement to fine arts, and which provided a strong connection to the artistic circles of Beirut.

***Shi ͑r,* a turning point**

Today synonym of avant-gardism, modernism and renewal, *Shi ͑r* had in its time many detractors and was forbidden in many Arab countries. All that brought it to face growing hurdles, partly economic and financial. Hostility and wariness was mainly due to the magazine’s liberal conception about literature, politics and life, including particularly Al-Khāl active campaign to encourage writers to adopt for writing *al-lugha l-mahkiyya* (spoken language) more on tune with the progress. Among *Shi ͑r* protagonists, Al-Khāl was alone in wanting closer *fuṣḥā* and *maḥkiyya*. In that sense, *Shi ͑r* crashed in 1964 into what he called *jidār al-lugha* (the language barrier). And, despite the reprise in 1967, the pan Arab political context post-1967 constituted an aggravating circumstance bringing *Shi ͑r* to cease definitively its publication in 1970. Denigration was particularly leaded by writers of the pan Arab magazine *al-Ᾱdāb* (Literatures) which in time went so far to accuse *Shi ͑r* to be sponsored by the CIA, and its poets to be American Agents!

Although it has been out of circulation for many decades, *Shi ͑r* was definitely a turning point in the History of modern Arabic poetry: there is, indeed, “a before” and “an after” of the so called *Shi ͑r* magazine movement (*ḥarakat majallat* *Shi ͑r*). *Shi r*’s influence on Arabic literature in general and poetry in particular, is still gaining momentum. In 2007, Beirut celebrated its 50 years and most of its debates remain a topical subject.

*Shi ͑r* was also a turning point for Al-Khāl’s life. Indeed, posterity remembers him more as a cultural activist leading this modernist movement than for his own works.

**Personal works**

During his *Shi ͑r* editorial duties, Al-Khāl also published some poetry collections: *al-Bi’r al-mahjūra* (1958) and *Qaṣā’id fil-arba ͑īn* (1960). In 1970-71, he resigned from dār al-Nahār to dedicate his time to achieve a translation of the Bible into contemporary Arabic usage.

In 1978, he published *Complete Works and Belated Poems*, and an important and decisive collection of critical essays, *al-Ḥadātha fī l-shi ͑r*. This was followed by *Rasā’il ilā Don Quixote* (1979); and *Al-wilādé l-thāniyé* (1981) where he did his best to apply in writing the spoken Arabic. He also got in his credit many translations of important works, including among others, those by Ezra Pound, T.S. Elliot, Carl Sandburg, Leland Dewitt Baldwin, Jacques Maritain, Robert Frost, Kamal S. Salibi, and Khalil Gibran (*The Prophet*). Furthermore, in 1987, the year of his death, was published *Dafātir al-ayyām* which resumed his deep thought on literature and life.

**Main works**

- *Salmāya* (My Salmā), novel, ns, Tripoli (Lebanon), 1934

- *al-Ḥurriyya* (Freedom), poetry, dār al-Kitāb, Beirut, 1944

- *Hīrūdyā* (Herod), play, dār al-Hudā, New York, 1954

- *al-Bi’r al-mahjūra* (the Deserted Well), poetry, dār Majallat *Shi ͑r*, 1958

- *Qaṣā’id fil-arba ͑īn* (Belated Poems), poetry, dār Majallat *Shi ͑r*, 1960

- *al-A’māl al-shi‘riyya l-kāmila* (Completed Poetic Works), dār Majallat *Shi ͑r*, 1973 (2nd edition 1979)

*- al-Ḥadātha fī l-shi ͑r* (Modernity in poetry), dār al-ṭalī‘a, 1978

- *Rasā’il ilā Don Quixote* (Letters toDon Quixote), essays, dār al-Nahār li-nashr, 1979

- *Al-wilādé l-thāniyé* (The Second Birth), essays in spoken Arabic, dār Majallat Shi ͑r, 1981

*- Dafātir al-ayyām* (Days Notebooks), essays, Riad el-Rayyis, London, 1987