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| al-`Ayni, Yusuf (1927-) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| A playwright, actor, and director, Yusuf al-`Ayni was instrumental in the development of Iraqi theatre from the 1950s through the 1970s. His three-decades-long career coincides with the advent and flourishing of a professional theatre in Iraq, one primarily concerned with addressing political and social concerns. He emerged during a time of political turmoil under the British-supported monarchy and his tenure coincided with the establishment of the independent Iraqi state in 1958 and later the rise of the Baathists and Saddam Hussein. In the late 1960s, al-`Ayni initiated the movement within Iraq that combined classical Arabic forms with techniques from Western political theatre, particularly those of Bertolt Brecht. |
| A playwright, actor, and director, Yusuf al-`Ayni was instrumental in the development of Iraqi theatre from the 1950s through the 1970s. His three-decades-long career coincides with the advent and flourishing of a professional theatre in Iraq, one primarily concerned with addressing political and social concerns. He emerged during a time of political turmoil under the British-supported monarchy and his tenure coincided with the establishment of the independent Iraqi state in 1958 and later the rise of the Baathists and Saddam Hussein. In the late 1960s, al-`Ayni initiated the movement within Iraq that combined classical Arabic forms with techniques from Western political theatre, particularly those of Bertolt Brecht.  File: Yusuf al-`Ayni.jpg  Figure 1 Yusuf al-`Ayni  Source: Image from <http://www.aliabdulameer.com/>; the photograph originates from Yusuf Al-'Ayni, so please contact [ali@aliabdulameer.com](mailto:ali@aliabdulameer.com)  Al-`Ayni grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Baghdad and studied theatre at Baghdad’s Institute of Fine Arts. In 1952, he co-founded the first professional theatre company in Iraq, *al-Masrah al-Hadith* (the Modern Theater) troupe, which would dominate that country's theatre scene for the next three decades. As a playwright, he engaged Arabic and Iraqi politics and events from a Marxist perspective. The one-act *Ra’s al-Shilila* (*The End of the Thread* [1951]), which has been translated as *Where the Power Lies*, serves as an early example of his commitment to social justice. In it, a poor, old man’s simple request is denied by corrupt government officials until he chances upon the business card of an influential personage, which in itself impresses the officials into compliance. Other notable plays include *Ana Ummak Ya Shakir* (*I am Your Mother, 0 Shakir* [1958]), which celebrates a family that resists an oppressive monarchical regime, *Al-Miftah* (*The Key* [1967-68]), which urges political action over the blind observance of outdated tradition, and the anti-imperialist *Al-Kharaba* (*The Ruin* [1970]).  File: Iraqi actors Yusuf Al-`Ayni and Azadohi Samuel perform in a play in Baghdad.jpg  Figure 2 Yusuf Al-`Ayni and Azadohi Samuel  Source: Image from <http://www.aliabdulameer.com/>; the photograph originates from Yusuf Al-'Ayni, so please contact [ali@aliabdulameer.com](mailto:ali@aliabdulameer.com)  Al-`Ayni was acclaimed as an actor on the stage and screen and frequently appeared in his own works and directed for his company. His performance of the lead role in 1957 in one of the first and most popular Iraqi movies, *Sa’id Effendi* (*Mr. Sa’id*), increased his renown. The film’s veiled political message is consistent with Al-`Ayni’s career as a whole. In his various capacities as playwright, actor, director, and teacher, he was dedicated to advancing a theatre of the people. List of Works al-`Ayni, Yusuf (1981) *Ashr Masrahiyyat min Yusuf al-'Ani* (*Ten Plays from Yusuf al-`Ayni*), Beirut: al-Mu' assasah al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wa-1 Nashr.  Jayyusi, Salma Khadra (ed.) (2003) *Where the Power Lies*, trans. Lena Jayyusi and Thomas G. Ezzy, *Short Arabic Plays: An Anthology* 1-19, Northampton, MA: Interlink.  Jayyusi, Salma Khadra and Roger Allen (eds.) (1995) *The Key*, trans. Salwa Jabsheh and Alan Brownjohn, *Modern Arabic Drama: An Anthology* 253-288, Bloomington: Indiana University Press. |
| Further reading:  (al-`Ayni)  (al-`Ayni, 'Al-Waqt al-ladhi lam Yadhab Suda' ('The Time That Has Not Passed in Vain'))  (Yousif)  (al-`Ayni, Yusuf al-`Ayni Interview in Arabic) |