**Moshe Shamir (1921—2004)**

A leading Israeli Hebrew author, playwright, essayist, opinion journalist and editor. He started his literary career as a committed socialist Zionist. Yet he shifted ever more to the right, and in the aftermath of the 1967 Israeli-Arab War he became one of the leading spokespersons for the Israeli nationalist right, serving as a member of the Israeli parliament between 1977-1981 as a representative of that sector. This political transition was also reflected in his fiction.

Shamir is generally recognized, alongside S. Yizhar, as the most prominent writer of what is generally known as the “1948 Generation.” In the 1946 manifesto “‘Im Bney Dori” [“With My Generation”], Shamir articulates a strong generational consciousness and advocates socially and nationally engaged realist literature, in terms informed by both Soviet socialist realism and the American social fiction of the first half of the twentieth century. The manifesto became the cornerstone for the subsequent critical appreciation of the 1948 Generation. Still, Shamir never fully abided by the rules of his manifesto, and his works often question the very possibility of political and social intervention.

Through the 1950s, Shamir published novels and plays that enjoyed critical as well as commercial success; indeed, he was arguably the best selling canonical author of the time. His reputation owes to three works in particular. His first novel, *Hu Halakh ba-Sadot* [*He Walked in the Fields*, 1948], is set during the Second World War and relates an affair between a young male kibbutz member and a refugee from Europe against the backdrop of the formation of the Jewish military force in Palestine. Notwithstanding the ambivalence with which the novel portrays its male protagonist, the novel was perceived as the literary emblem of the determination and sacrifice of the 1948 Generation during the struggle for Independence. Shamir’s 1951 *Bemo Yadav: Pirkey Elik* [*With His Own Hands*] is a biography of his brother, Elik, who fell in the 1948 War. In this work Shamir comes the closest to Socialist Realism, producing a mythical hagiography of the new Jew. His 1954 *Melekh Basar va-Dam* [*A King of Flesh and Blood*], is generally considered his best novel. The story of the efforts of the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus to consolidate his rule is generally read as a meditation on the modern State of Israel and its politics. All these works evince Shamir’s on-going endeavor to craft Hebrew idioms fit to his subject matters.

Shamir published more then fifty books of fiction, poetry, drama, essays and journalistic writing. He received various awards for his writing, most notably the 1988 Israel Prize for Hebrew Literature. From the late 1950s on, however, he became a target of opprobrium for younger writers and critics, who accused him (and the 1948 Generation in general) for privileging in his literary works national-ideological concerns over aesthetic ones.

Written by Shai Ginsburg