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An affinity for animals and lost causes

This issue contains an excerpt from a powerful new book by Romain Gary called *White Dog*. It is an explosive treatment of one of the most explosive issues of our time. It is also the story of a man who tries, against the odds, to correct a great injustice done to an animal—and to other men.

I first met Romain Gary 12 years ago over the phone. He was at that time the French consul general in Los Angeles, and he had just written an article for LIFE on Charles de Gaulle. I was supposed to be editing the piece for publication, but there was very little editing for me to do and no need to call him. The truth is that I had read and admired two of Gary's novels (*The Company of Men* and *The Roots of Heaven*), and it seemed like a good excuse to make the acquaintance of an important writer. The voice I met over the phone was rich, charming and heavily accented. I am not an accent-spotter, but from what I have learned since, I would say that Romain Gary's accent is 50% French, 50% Russian, 50% Jewish and perhaps 10% American—a high-octane 160% voice reflecting his origins and experience.

Since then we have had a clear and easy understanding: Gary is busy writing books and doesn't want to stop for a magazine article unless it is something special for him; but if it is special, he will do it. There have been four such occasions: a LIFE issue on the sea, which Gary loves; the mutiny of the French generals, whom Gary understands; the 1969 repudiation of De Gaulle, whom Gary admires; and an open letter to the elephant, whom Gary idolizes. I do too. "Dear Elephant, Sir" is my favorite tribute to an animal.

White Dog is also about an animal, a magnificent German shepherd that had been trained to a terrible purpose. The book, which grew out of Gary's and his former wife Jean Seberg's experiences in Los Angeles two years ago, was published in France last spring to a storm of controversy and immediate best-sellerdom.

Gary always writes about people who make deep personal commitments in spite of circumstance. He does not actually believe in lost causes, but he is irresistibly attracted to them. He is enough of a cynic or realist to be convinced that man will always make a fool of himself. But he is also a romanticist: he believes that gestures, even futile ones, are important, and that they give man a precious dignity, win or lose.

The central characters of Gary's books often lose, but something important always survives. The central character of *White Dog* happens to be Gary himself.

Ralph Graves
RALPH GRAVES
Managing Editor



ROMAIN GARY

LIFE

A Tom Sawyer Boyhood, 1970

The chilling story
of a dog with two masters
by Romain Gary

THE MIDEAST AFTER NASSER



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