



## Romain Gary: A Tall Story

*David Bellos*

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## **Romain Gary: A Tall Story** David Bellos

Airman, war hero, immigrant, law student, diplomat, novelist and celebrity spouse, Romain Gary had several lives thrust upon him by the history of the twentieth century, but he also aspired to lead many more. He wrote more than two dozen books and a score of short stories under several different names in two languages, English and French, neither of which was his mother tongue. Gary had a gift for narrative that endeared him to ordinary readers, but won him little respect among critics far more intellectual than he could ever be. His varied and entertaining writing career tells a different story about the making of modern literary culture from the one we are accustomed to hearing.

Born Roman Kacew in Vilna (now Lithuania) in 1914 and raised by only his mother after his father left them, Gary rose to become French Consul General in Los Angeles and the only man ever to win the Goncourt Prize twice.

This biography follows the many threads that lead from Gary's wartime adventures and early literary career to his years in Hollywood and his marriage to the actress Jean Seberg. It illuminates his works in all their incarnations, and culminates in the tale of his most brilliant deception: the fabrication of a complex identity for his most successful nom de plume, Émile Ajar.

In his new portrait of Gary, David Bellos brings biographical research together with literary and cultural analysis to make sense of the many lives of Romain Gary - a hero fit for our times, as well as his own.

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