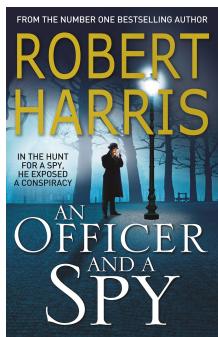
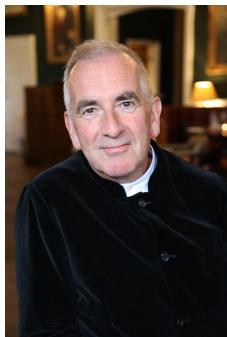


THE WALTER  
SCOTT PRIZE  
FOR HISTORICAL  
FICTION **10 YEARS**



## Readers' Guides



### 2014 Winner

## An Officer and A Spy

### Robert Harris

Hutchinson

### About the author

Robert Harris is the author of many bestselling novels including the Cicero Trilogy, Fatherland, Enigma, Archangel, Pompeii, The Ghost, The Fear Index, An Officer and a Spy, which won four prizes including the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, Conclave, Munich and The Second Sleep. Several of his books have been filmed, including The Ghost, which was directed by Roman Polanski.

He has been a television correspondent with the BBC and a newspaper columnist for the London Sunday Times and The Daily Telegraph. His novels have sold more than ten million copies and been translated into more than thirty languages. He lives in Berkshire, England, with his wife and four children.

### About the book

This is the story of the infamous Dreyfus affair told as a chillingly dark, hard-edged novel of conspiracy and espionage.

Paris in 1895. Alfred Dreyfus, a young Jewish officer, has just been convicted of treason, sentenced to life imprisonment at Devil's Island, and stripped of his rank in front of a baying crowd of twenty-thousand. Among the witnesses to his

humiliation is Georges Picquart, the ambitious, intellectual, recently promoted head of the counterespionage agency that "proved" Dreyfus had passed secrets to the Germans.

At first, Picquart firmly believes in Dreyfus's guilt. But it is not long after Dreyfus is delivered to his desolate prison that Picquart stumbles on

information that leads him to suspect that there is still a spy at large in the French military. As evidence of the most malignant deceit mounts and spirals inexorably toward the uppermost levels of government, Picquart is compelled to question not only the case against Dreyfus but also his most deeply held beliefs about his country, and about himself.

Bringing to life the scandal that mesmerized the world at the turn of the twentieth century, Robert Harris tells a tale of uncanny timeliness—a witch hunt, secret tribunals, out-of-control intelligence agencies, the fate of a whistle-blower—richly dramatized with the singular storytelling mastery that has marked all of his internationally best-selling novels.

## Discussion Questions

Describe the Paris of the late 19th century, with its demimonde decadence, pugnacious press, and political enmities. How well does Harris do in bring the ambience of the city to life? Are there any parallels to our current time?

What is the effect of France's loss of Alsace and Lorraine to the Germans? How does that set the stage for the events that occur in the novel?

Talk about France's anti-Semitism. How deeply does it run permeate the culture and why?

What made Dreyfus such a satisfying target for the French public? What does Picquart mean when he reflects, after the Dreyfus's conviction, that it is "as if all the loathing and recrimination bottled up since the defeat of 1870 has found an outlet in a single individual"?

Why does the military stonewall Picquart's later finding of Dreyfus's innocence? Why is so difficult for institutions to admit to wrong doing or mistakes?

General Gonse asks an interesting question of Picquart: "I know your views on the Chosen Race—really, when all is said and done, what does it matter to you if one Jew stays on Devil's Island?"

Exactly, Does it matter...in the larger scope of events? Why or why not?

What happens when institutions place their own survival above all else? Does this occur today? Do we have institutions in government, business, religion, education that are concerned with their own preservation at the expense of their integrity—that place their continued existence over what is morally right?

History is rife with "cover-ups"—we've seen them time and again. Why is it so difficult to follow a moral path in public life?

What do you think of the final scene between Picquart and Dreyfus?

*(Questions adapted from LitLovers.com)*