

The American Library in Paris

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The American Library in Paris selects *An Officer and a Spy* by Robert Harris as the winner of its second annual book award

For immediate release

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PARIS. *An Officer and a Spy*, by Robert Harris, is the winner of the second annual American Library in Paris Book Award.

The annual prize honors the most distinguished book of the year about France or the French-American encounter, and carries a cash award of \$5,000.

The jury for the award, drawn from the American Library's Writers Council, was composed of authors Alice Kaplan, Sebastian Faulks, and Pierre Assouline. Of *An Officer and a Spy*, published by the Hutchinson imprint of Random House and Knopf, the jury stated that "Robert Harris's novel *An Officer and a Spy* is a tour de force. He has somehow managed to make a thrilling narrative from the well-known events of the Dreyfus case. Major Georges Picquart was an official observer at the public humiliation of Dreyfus and then became head of the "Statistical Section" or secret intelligence unit that had first accused Dreyfus of treachery. By using Picquart as his narrator, Harris masterfully takes us inside the guts of a conspiracy. Robert Harris is fascinated by spying and intrigue, and here he sets the rigid yet corrupt procedures of the army against the louche and fetid atmosphere of fin de siècle Paris. It is a book that grips and shocks and shows on every page the enormous enjoyment the author must have had in writing it."

The jury went on to say that "to choose between fiction and non-fiction is a difficult, perhaps absurd, task for a prize, but the depth and accuracy of Robert Harris's research is on a par with that of any factual account of the affair. Nor does he flinch from the awkward aspects of it: that Dreyfus was not an heroic or particularly likeable man, for instance, or that Picquart never much cared for him. In addition to this

underlying seriousness, it was the fictional exuberance of the book -- the sense that the reader has of actually being there -- that in the end made *An Officer and a Spy* the judges' unanimous and enthusiastic choice."

The other books on the shortlist were:

- *How to Ruin a Queen: Marie Antoinette, the Stolen Diamonds and the Scandal that Shook the French Throne*, by Jonathan Beckman
- *The Embrace of Unreason: France 1914-1940*, by Frederick Brown
- *Brave Genius: A Scientist, a Philosopher, and their Daring Adventures from the French Resistance to the Nobel Prize*, by Sean B. Carroll
- *Citizen Emperor: Napoleon in Power 1799-1815*, by Philip Dwyer
- *Lovers at the Chameleon Club, Paris 1932*, by Francine Prose (fiction)

The book award ceremony took place in Paris at the George C. Marshall Center in the presence of the author. Harris is also the author of *The Ghost*, *The Fear Index*, *Pompeii*, *Arch Angel*, *Enigma*, and *Fatherland*, among others.

The award is supported by a grant from the Florence Gould Foundation. This second award is for books originally published between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014.

Book-length prose works originally written in English, including but not limited to fiction, history, biography, travel, politics, cooking, and art, were eligible for the award. Ninety-four submissions were received in 2014, and nominations are already open for the 2015 award.

The American Library in Paris was founded in 1920 with books sent by American libraries to United States personnel serving in World War I. It has since grown to more than 120,000 volumes, making it the largest English-language library on the European continent, and perhaps in any non-English-speaking country in the world.

The Library's international membership enjoys reading rooms, research facilities, book groups, children's programming, art workshops, film screenings, community events, and the city's best-known stage for appearances by distinguished authors.

In addition to Kaplan, Faulks and Assouline, the Library's Writers Council consists of Julian Barnes, Laurent de Brunhoff, Christopher Buckley, Adam Gopnik, Laura Furman, Mavis Gallant, Diane Johnson, Philippe Labro, Joyce Carol Oates, William Jay Smith, Lily Tuck, and Scott Turow. Last year's book award winner, Fredrik Logevall, is also on the council.

"The Florence Gould Foundation has done so much to further French-American understanding and to assist the historic American institutions in Paris," said Charles Trueheart, director of the Library. "We're grateful for what its enthusiastic support of the prize will mean for the Library - and for fine writing about France."

Details about the award are available on the Library's website, at <http://americanlibraryinparis.org/events-programs/american-library-in-paris-book-award.html>

For media inquiries, please contact programs manager Grant Rosenberg at rosenberg@americanlibraryinparis.org.