



The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two

Piers Paul Read

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two

Piers Paul Read

The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two Piers Paul Read

July 20, 1894. The German military attaché in Paris receives a visit from a seedy-looking man who claims to be a French army officer in desperate need of money, offering to sell them military secrets.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus was a rising star in the French artillery command. Reserved yet intelligent and ambitious, Dreyfus had everything: a family, money, and a clear path to a prestigious post on the General Staff. However, Dreyfus had enemies as a result of his ambition. Many of them came from the impoverished Catholic aristocracy and disliked Dreyfus because he was rich, bourgeois, and, above all, a Jew.

On the basis of flimsy evidence, Dreyfus was placed under arrest for the crime of high treason. Not long afterward, he was sentenced to spend the rest of his life on the legendary, lethal Devil's Island. The saga of Dreyfus's many trials—he was not exonerated until 1906, twelve years after first being arrested—the fight to free him, and the intrigues on both sides, is a fast-moving mystery story rife with heroes and villains, loose women, loyal wives, bisexual men, tricksters, and charlatans. But this was no mere sideshow. The anti-Semitism and deceit on display in the Dreyfus case was an ominous prelude to the Holocaust and the long, bloody twentieth century to come.

In an era when religious conflict, fierce patriotism, and charged debates over national identity pervade the public sphere, the scandal of Captain Dreyfus still has much to teach us. In the hands of prizewinning novelist, biographer, and narrative historian Piers Paul Read, this real-life morality tale comes alive for a new generation. Using his storytelling skills and a nuanced, deep knowledge of French history, Read rediscovers l'affaire Dreyfus as a rich, riveting tale.

The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two Details

Date : Published March 13th 2012 by Bloomsbury Press (first published February 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9781608194322

Author : Piers Paul Read

Format : Hardcover 416 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Cultural, France, Politics, European History

 [Download The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in T ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two Piers Paul Read

From Reader Review The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two for online ebook

Quratulain says

“Ok”

Mike Clinton says

I wrote a review of this book for the journal *The History Teacher*, which should appear in an issue or two. Here are parts of that review:

For over a century, the ordeal endured by Captain Alfred Dreyfus has fascinated, appalled, and inspired generations well beyond the borders of France, where the events of “the Dreyfus Affair” transpired. So much has been written about the Affair that a reader might reasonably ask what any new book has to contribute to our knowledge of it. Piers Paul Read, an accomplished novelist and non-fiction author, offers an engaging account that conveys the drama and suspense of the Affair, making it a commendable choice for the general reader, although students and scholars will find no new insights or substantial scholarship to draw their attention.

Read traces the origins of the Dreyfus Affair back to the French Revolution, which inaugurated the long struggle between the values of a secular republic and those of traditional French institutions. After an uneasy consensus created the Third Republic, the army became one of the last bastions of the forces of tradition, wedding aristocracy and Catholicism to the officer corps. It was this segment of French society that felt itself under siege by the Dreyfusards during the Affair. Read, who is forthright in the preface about the difficulties the Affair poses for his own identity as a Catholic (p.4), depicts the Dreyfusards’ post-Affair rise to political power as a destructive period for the Catholic Church as an institution in France. Anti-clerical policies sought to neutralize the influence of the Catholic Church in education and other areas of civil life and subvert the reactionary, anti-republican, and anti-Semitic sensibilities that guided the behavior of so many Catholics and their leaders – lay and clerical – during the Affair. Read portrays the Radicals’ campaign as a vindictive over-reaction that only deepened rather than healed the cultural scars that afflicted France. While one might not feel as much sympathy as Read does for the plight of French Catholicism during this era, he does convincingly advance the point that the dynamics in the Affair were more complex than generally characterized.

Read synthesizes and comments on a considerable array of secondary works on the Affair – some of it in French, most in English – but relies upon hardly any primary sources. His personal perspective as a Catholic seeking to come to terms with this episode of history and his talents as a writer are his main contributions to the literature on the Dreyfus Affair.

Normz says

Extremely detailed interesting account. I knew about the Dreyfus Affair on a very high level, but this gave me a completely new look at the events, as well as a general view on anti-Semitism. I started finding it hard

to follow 3/4 way through, I couldn't keep track of the huge number of characters and details.

Aki Korhonen says

If you ever wondered what the Dreyfus fuss was about, this book is for you. I found it a very interesting and in-depth look at the events surrounding the scandal that retains name recognition to this day.

Jonathan says

The Dreyfus Affair pops up time and again when reading French books from the end of the nineteenth century. I've recently been reading Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* in which the characters keep discussing the Affair and anyone who has read anything about Zola will realise that Zola played a significant part in the Affair. Up to now I've just read around the Dreyfus Affair and have only been aware of the bare bones of the story; but the topic is a fascinating story in its own right and I thought it was time to read more on the subject.

'The Dreyfus Affair' by Piers Paul Read, I feel, is directed towards the general reader and Read gives as much background information as possible; he starts off by taking us back to the French Revolution. This seems a bit excessive at first but it's useful because Read shows how during the revolutionary period full civil rights were extended to Jewish people, how the Catholic church came under attack and how the aristocracy were treated, er, harshly. He then proceeds to sketch out the Franco-Prussian war and the effect that this French defeat had on the French psyche. Although a lot of this may be already known by the reader it is useful because with these early chapters Read is mainly attempting to explain how and why the anti-Dreyfusards were so aggressively opposed to Dreyfus and the Dreyfusards; they saw the conservative, Catholic-centred French society under attack from Jews, protestants, money-men, Germans, intellectuals, deviants and the like.

Throughout the narrative the Dreyfusards have to battle against an extremely anti-Semitic press led by Édouard Drumont and his paper *La Libre Parole*. The paper does not just attack the Dreyfusards but also the army if it is seen to be too lenient towards the Jewish people. Drumont believes that Jews are all part of a 'syndicate' which includes Protestants, Free Masons, bankers etc. and which is out to take control of France and enslave Catholics. Anyone who is lenient towards Jews are soon accused of being on the syndicate's payroll.

I don't intend to describe every detail of the Dreyfus Affair as it gets very complicated, but it starts out quite simply: a note is retrieved from a wastepaper basket in the German embassy that suggests that a French officer is passing military secrets to the Germans; they soon narrow the list of likely officers down until they get to Dreyfus and when they compare his handwriting to the note it looks similar enough for them to arrest Dreyfus. Du Paty, who ends up being one of the main villains in the whole story, is an amateur handwriting expert and it is his persistence that drives the case against Dreyfus. When more experienced handwriting experts look at the evidence they don't quite agree. With so little evidence it is uncertain why General Mercier decided to continue with the prosecution of Dreyfus. Read suggests that he may have been frightened of *La Libre Parole* finding out that he'd dropped a treason case against a Jew, or it may have been that he wanted to appear as a strong leader. Read doesn't believe that at this stage the prime motive for advancing the case was anti-Semitic, as such.

On 15th October 1894 Dreyfus was officially arrested. Dreyfus declares his innocence throughout and those hoping to prosecute him have nothing more to go on than the comparison of his handwriting with that on the note. This is, for me, the first time where the military missed an opportunity to exit from the debacle. At this stage even du Paty suggests that if the evidence is too weak then they must let him go. So what do they do? Well, General Mercier basically fabricates a 'secret dossier' on Dreyfus. But why? Read suggests that it was Mercier's fear of the anti-Semitic press and of losing prestige amongst his colleagues that drove him to do this:

The die was cast. If Mercier were now to free Dreyfus, he would be accused, as in the case of Schulmann, of being in the pay of the Jews. He would also lose face with his cabinet colleagues, particularly the Foreign Minister Hanotaux, who had advised him to drop the case against Dreyfus.

So Dreyfus was convicted of treason after the dodgy handwriting 'experts' had declared that the difference in styles was due to Dreyfus deliberately disguising his style. Major Henry had stated that a 'respectable person' had accused Dreyfus and when this was still not enough to convict him they brought out the secret dossier which was viewed in private. Dreyfus was shipped off to Devil's Island where he would live virtually in solitary confinement for five years.

We now enter the next stage of the Affair. Dreyfus's brother Mathieu now spends all his time to try to prove his brother's innocence but with little success. Meanwhile another officer, Picquart comes across a new piece of evidence, a *petit bleu* telegram, again from the German embassy, that has the exact handwriting as the original note and Picquart can prove that the real culprit was Major Esterhazy. So, this is another chance for the military to put things straight. Do they? No, they ship Picquart off to Tunisia to get him out of the way and fake some more documents.

Luckily enough the information is leaked and Mathieu gets to know the name of the real culprit and kick up a fuss. The military protect Esterhazy, even though they now know that he's the traitor, and Esterhazy has to attend a court martial - he's found to be not guilty of course! And Picquart is arrested and sent to prison for passing on military documents. So we now have two innocent men incarcerated and the guilty man protected by the military and shipped off to England. Read states:

It was clear that, whatever the evidence and however the clear the reasoning, the French were unwilling to accept that they were being deceived by the leaders of the one institution that retained their respect - the army.

This was on 10th January 1898 and on 13th January Émile Zola entered the fray with his open letter to the French President, called *J'accuse..!* Read says that 'given that much of what he wrote was inevitably conjecture, Zola's pamphlet was a remarkably accurate summary of the Dreyfus Affair.' Accurate and explosive; it sparked anti-Semitic riots across France and resulted in Zola going to trial for defamation. He was found guilty, of course, though he was allowed to appeal the decision. He lost the second trial and left for England - this period is covered in Ernest Vizetelly's *With Zola in England: A Story of Exile*.

From hereon events proceed at a blistering pace and it's quite confusing, so in summary: Cavaignac the new War Minister tried to put an end to the Dreyfusard cause but Henry's forgeries were uncovered and Henry committed suicide; the President Faure died and Loubet was elected; the secret dossier was dismissed as a fake.

In the end Dreyfus was recalled to attend a second court martial in Rennes on 7th August 1899. This was surely the military's last chance to redeem itself. But no luck, Dreyfus was re-convicted of treason but with 'extenuating circumstances'. His sentence was for ten years. The prime-minister, exasperated at the military's decision, ended up offering Dreyfus a pardon which he reluctantly accepts as he's still technically guilty of the crime. This compromise that basically satisfies no-one appears, with hindsight, to be just what is needed to defuse the situation; it's a bodge but it allows things to settle down for a while.

It was not until 1906 that Dreyfus was declared 'not guilty' by the Supreme Court. He died in 1935.

In trying to write a review of a book on the Dreyfus Affair I've found it difficult not to just recount the actual story. But the book is very readable and well-researched and although the author states in the introduction that there has been little new evidence since the 1970s on the subject there is something to be said for a new book for the general reader and this is a brilliant introduction.

Jane says

Where I got the book: my local library. Yay for the local library, because this one might be thought of as a bit of an obscure subject in America.

You can't do any reading about late nineteenth-century France without stumbling across the Dreyfus Affair. So I knew the basics: a Jewish army captain was wrongly accused of passing military secrets to the Germans (Enemy #1 at the time, not that long after the Franco-Prussian War), interned on Devil's Island, and subsequently released and repatriated when the real culprit was found. Huge, HUGE ruckus involving lots of nasty antisemitism. French author Emile Zola wrote a famous newspaper article entitled J'ACCUSE! in which he lambasted the powers-that-be about the whole business, and the rumor ran that Zola's untimely death (of carbon monoxide poisoning when a chimney became blocked; his wife survived) was linked to the Affair (did anti-Dreyfusards get up on the roof and block that chimney?)

OK the Zola death bit was an aside, following my own interests, but Read covers the actual Affair in meticulous detail. The book is clearly aimed at the general reader with little background knowledge (the footnote informing the reader that the French surname Henry is pronounced "Onrri" was priceless) and Read does a pretty good job of bringing the reader up to speed with the way life worked in France at the time. Among the upper-middle to upper classes honor was paramount, duels were fought to defend it, and lines were clearly drawn on the basis of religion, profession, politics and education. You were this, or you were that. As the Affair became the most talked-about news item in France, you were either Dreyfusard or anti-Dreyfusard depending on your tribal affiliations. Passions were inflated by the newspapers, which were a power on the scale of today's TV networks; the rate of literacy was high in France, and everyone read the news. Antisemitism, unhampered by today's historical hindsight and politically correct taboos, was an acceptable stance, if decried by many, and blatantly antisemitic newspapers fanned the flames. The Catholic church was also under attack from intellectuals whose loss of faith had less to do with God than with the church hierarchy, Jesuit schools, and attitudes towards both a hundred years after the Revolution had (temporarily) ripped out their staunchest supporters, the conservative aristocracy.

Naturally all this hoo-ha involved a huge cast of characters, and Read efficiently keeps them in line in the reader's mind without resorting to too many reminders of who they are. The main players: Dreyfus, Esterhazy, du Paty de Clam, Henry and so on, are sketched in with pleasing economy, and the chapters are arranged logically without too much departure from strict chronological order. Dreyfus' suffering is vividly

portrayed in the one chapter that covers his living conditions on Devil's Island.

The Affair led to the separation of church and state in France, to the dissolution of religious orders, possibly (I'd have to check this) to Zionism, and to vast changes in the Army. It went a long way to shaping 20th-century France. So if you're interested in things French you've really got to tackle the Dreyfus Affair in detail at some time or the other, and this very readable account would be an excellent place to start. Recommended.

Ana says

If I remember correctly, even though I've known of the Dreyfus Affair since school days and have definitely went on Wikipedia to educate myself about it, this is the first book I've read that is wholly dedicated to the subject. And it is a good one. It tracks the pre-Dreyfus situation, up through all of the individuals responsible for the affair, then discusses some of the fallout. For anyone interested in history, and specifically historical moments of a certain magnitude and importance to certain peoples, this is a very good read.

Brendan Hodge says

I hadn't read a book on the Dreyfus affair before, and if you're in a similar position and would be interested in reading about the scandal which caused a political crisis in France in the closing decade of the 19th century (and whose reverberations were still being felt at least through the Great War and perhaps as late as WW2 and the Vichy government) this is a highly readable introduction. Read is a journalist and novelist, not an academic, and he writes in an enjoyable, novelistic style. Particularly helpful is that he situates the scandal (in which a Jewish artillery officer was wrongly accused of selling military secrets to Germany -- at first, arguably, by mistake but later kept in prison on Devils Island long after the military knew he was innocent because they were ashamed to lose face by admitting they were wrong) in the wider context of the French cultural and religious conflicts from the French Revolution through the Great War.

David says

What a prolonged agonizing cause célèbre! This dismal tragic biography is placed in the aftermath of the 1870-1871 Franco-Prussian War. The Affair years of the 1890s are set in a sociological, moral, religious, humanistic era of French history.

There was no ostensible motive for Dreyfus' alleged treason, and no incriminating evidence. His military chief officers framed him against a backdrop of nationalist, anti-Semitic sentiment. High-ranking military personnel conspired to frame an innocent man. Not an entertaining read!

This is dense reading, a hundred persons to keep in place, but the book needed editing - there is some duplication, a few errors, and an uneven presentation. Of its 4 Parts, the first of 50 pages drags and sets the historical stage, the second of 95 pages covers the first conviction and confinement on Devil's Island, the third of 200 pages is good reporting, especially in chapters 12 ('The Pen versus the Sword') and 13.

Overall, this 2002 history displays a novelist's synthesizing of previous books, leaning heavily on Bredin, Burns, Conybeare, Doise, Duclert, Harris, Hoffman, Johnson, Leps, Lindemann, Miquel, Paleologue, Reinach (in 7 volumes), Schwertfeger, Thomas, and books of 1901 and 1937 by Dreyfus. I do not fault the

author for this recycling; original research would be near impossible after 100 years of intense documentary mining. It has a good bibliography and an excellent index. I deem it a fairly good secondary work of historical biography.

Here and there, Read takes pains to absolve conservative Catholics for their roll, and Read gives credence to "the growing influence of Jews (even, remarkably, in the army), their role in prominent scandals, and the resentment they encountered." He includes extensive quotes from "Anti-Semitism: Its History and Causes" by the Jewish journalist Bernard Lazare.

As French political and religious history of the 1890s it deserves an A+, as a fine smooth-flowing comprehensive biography it warrants a B+ at best, for its expression of passionate human empathy it deserves B+, and as a social history it warrants an A. Apparently a better biography (which won the [Harry] Wolfson History Prize) is "The Man on Devil's Island: Alfred Dreyfus and the Affair That Divided France" by Ruth Harris, 2011 -- in 560 pages.

Born in 1941, Read wrote 16 works of fiction, and three biographical works. I appreciate reading this biography since I'd read (in 2000) and thought very highly of his excellent non-fiction biographical work "Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors" - the story of the 1972 crash of Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571 in the Andes mountains. 'Alive' won the Thomas More Medal, sold five million copies worldwide, and was adapted into film.

The British "Guardian" reviewed this book- "Read's 'The Dreyfus Affair' feels somewhat poorly timed and redundant, and all the more so since it is based on a very thin job of research. The first two parts of the book, taking the story up through Dreyfus's condemnation and imprisonment, rely almost entirely on published histories, and cite fewer than 10 original sources at first hand. Read's lack of expertise in French history comes through in the first pages of the book, in which he confuses the old regime's first and second estates, and the French Revolution's cult of reason and cult of the supreme being."

This review also posits this critique:- "Read makes the Dreyfusards out to be almost as rigid and intolerant as their opponents. He stresses that Zola offended devout Catholics with his anti-clerical novels." And in a section entitled 'Retribution', on the passage of secularist legislation in the wake of the Affair (including restrictions on Catholic schools), Read writes of "a determined effort by a government of atheists and Freemasons to prevent the education of French children in a faith that had flourished in France since the baptism of Clovis, 1,400 years before."

Simon Dobson says

An excellent telling of one of the strangest, most influential, and least remembered judicial-political scandals of the 19th century. Read deftly navigates the twists and turns of "The Affair", as it became known, with its cast of shady characters, officers, politicians, forgers, and spies.

It's an anti-Semitism that comes across most shockingly, letters-to-the-editor type abuses of Jews that would be unsurprising in a history of Nazi Germany but are unexpectedly vehement in a history of France. It serves as a reminder that anti-Semitism was a force across the continent in the early years of the 20th century, and Read traces many of the effects that it had on the conduct of both World Wars. Altogether a fascinating read.

Emylie says

DNF but will pick up again

Brian says

A decade ago I attempted a tandem read of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* with a reading friend; he made it through all of the books, I hit the wall in *Guermantes Way* and fell out. My issues began with the Dreyfus Affair - I just had no idea what the fuss was about, and in the days before Wikipedia, any of the online resources about the Affair were thin, at best. Not able to wrap my mind around the Affair, I soon lost my way amongst Proust's description of Parisian society and ultimately slogged my way through to the end of the book.

I promised myself when I joined Proustite's reading of ISoLT that I wouldn't start GW until I felt I adequately understood why the Dreyfus Affair was such a big deal. Thanks to Kris, I picked up this well researched and incredibly readable account of the Affair.

First: the author has an amazing capacity to tell a story. Piers Paul Read brought the characters (both major and minor) to vivid life. Twenty or so pages of photographs helped to put faces to people I didn't know prior to this read. I can't wait to read his bio on Alec Guinness.

The Dreyfus Affair was the touchstone for so much of what was wrong with French society. Anti-semitism, bitter fractional politics, and plenty of examples of the worst parts of humanity were on display for the world to witness. Families (including Proust's) were divided. A civil war almost occurred. The seeds of what made the Affair so terrible were sown in the French Revolution; the blooms of iniquity flowered all the way through the Vichy French rule of the country during WWII. The Affair wasn't a one-off issue. It was the culmination of a society that was rife with injustice.

So now I'm ready to give *Guermantes Way* another go. On Wednesday I board a ship to the Arctic Circle; no Internet, no phones - just polar bears, ice, me and Marcel.

Leslie says

So, as I read it, there are at least three levels on which to understand the Dreyfus Affair, a complex series of events that convulsed France at the end of the nineteenth century. The first is as a story of a wrongful conviction, of a man accused, convicted of, and punished horribly for a crime he didn't commit. On that level, it reminds me of other, more recent stories of investigations gone horribly wrong. Investigators fix too quickly on a single suspect, get tunnel vision, start reading all the evidence, even selecting and manipulating the evidence, based on how it fits a predetermined narrative of guilt. Then, having locked themselves into this narrative, they start distorting and lying to maintain it. They do so not so much because they actively wish to convince others of something they know to be untrue but because they have convinced themselves so absolutely that something is true and made themselves victims of cognitive dissonance when faced with evidence that doesn't fit that they are compelled to reconstruct reality to suit what they believe and to avoid

admitting, to themselves more than to anyone else, that they are disastrously mistaken. Later, facesaving and other less creditable motives kick in, too, but that's not usually where such stories of wrongful convictions start. The story of Alfred Dreyfus, convicted in 1894 of treason, fits this storyline very well. The fact that he was Jewish and personally unappealing to many (stiff, awkward, socially clumsy) made it easier to attach the story of guilt to him; investigators often fasten on suspects they consider wrong or odd or marginal for some reason, as they did here.

On the second level, it reveals fault lines in French history. The French Revolution had let loose all sorts of forces and, more than a century after the Revolution, many of them had not been reharnessed or stabilised. At the heart of the French state and of French society were a number of unresolved tensions: between the Catholic Church and the structure and meaning of the state, about secularism and anti-clericalism, about the purpose of education, about the meaning of true Frenchness, about the relationship between true Frenchness and those designated "other" (immigrants, Protestants, Jews, people of other ethnicities). What does it mean to be French? Who is a true Frenchman? How should true Frenchmen deal with threats to their Frenchness or with those who are not true Frenchmen? It is on this level that the opening chapters of Piers Paul Read's book make perfect sense and contribute to understanding the meaning of the story. Unfortunately, Read leaves readers to make these connections themselves; if you know the outlines of Dreyfus's story, these are pretty easy to make, but if you don't (and are reading the book to find them out), then you will have trouble seeing what these opening chapters, skimming over more than a century of history with no mention whatsoever of Alfred Dreyfus, are doing here. But so many threads of modern French history come together in the tangled knot of the Dreyfus Affair that an understanding of it is crucial to understanding the country. For example, the otherwise perplexing French insistence on a kind of radical secularism in public spaces and institutions, such as schools, makes so much sense against this background.

On the third level, the story is about the conflict between two fundamentally different world views, views we might label conservative and progressive, or right and left, or Republican and Democrat (if you're American). The former values religion and religious community as a force for social stability and health; distrusts change, innovation, or the notion of progress; looks to the past for strength, worth, and goodness; regards tradition as a source of strength and as an inherent good; values hierarchy, order, and stability; distrusts or resents the "other" and sees "others" as a threat to order, stability, and social coherence. The latter values the public sphere and wishes to keep it free of private matters, especially of private matters that could become coercive (such as religion); values progress, advancement, and change; looks to the future with hope rather than fear; regards the past as potentially burdensome, holding society and individuals back from pursuing the new and the improved; sees hierarchy as stifling, dangerous, and immoral; welcomes the other as bringing vitality and novelty to a potentially stifling or stagnating social environment. In the context of the Dreyfus Affair, the former describes the anti-Dreyfusards and the latter the Dreyfusards. This is why it makes sense to refer to people as anti-Dreyfusards or Dreyfusards even after Dreyfus's pardon. Their conflict actually had little to do with the man himself and everything to do with a struggle over how to make sense of the world and think about power and society; Alfred Dreyfus, poor man, became for many a convenient peg on which to hang these larger and largely incommensurable values. On this level, the story of the Dreyfus Affair remains enormously relevant to the world we live in today, because the powderkeg of tension that his conviction set off is still with us and we're still fighting the same basic battles.

Renato Magalhães Rocha says

Marcel Proust introduced me to the Dreyfus Affair. While reading his masterpiece *À la recherche du temps perdu*, I grew interested on this political scandal who seemed to have divided France in two opposing sides -

the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards - because, for being such an important part of French history, it was largely present throughout Proust's story and characters.

The Dreyfus Affair, by Piers Paul Read, depicts the sad but unfortunately true story of French captain Alfred Dreyfus, Jewish descent and military involved in a trial and conviction for treason for having sold Army secrets to a member of the German Embassy in Paris. Only he was innocent.

Before jumping into Dreyfus's trial in 1894, the author rightly gives us a political and religious context of France some years before it all happened, going back to the French Revolution that took place from 1789 to 1799. This context helps us to understand, among other key aspects, how the Jewish community stood on the society and how the Frenchmen held their Army really high in prestige.

As a result of his wrongful conviction, Dreyfus was sentenced for life imprisonment and deported to the Devil's Island, which is located off the coast of the French Guiana, in South America. There, he had to live under inhumane conditions (isolation, bad diet, later he had to sleep shackled to his bed...) Throughout all of this, his wife Lucie kept corresponding with him through letters - although she was not permitted to write about the case itself -, and this communication helped Alfred get through, in hope to prove his innocence and to once again return to the arms of his wife and children.

Two years later of his conviction, in 1896, there was some evidence showing that the real culprit was indeed someone else. It was fascinating yet immensely exasperating to find out how the High Command of the Army and members of the Government, once aware of the wrongful conviction of Dreyfus and knowing the identity of the true 'spy', major Esterhazy, fought to keep the unlucky captain in the Devil's Island while protecting the vile major, trying to save the honor of the institution by not admitting their horrid mistake.

The press also played a big part in the affair, not so much by describing the events taking place at the time, but ultimately by being used through leaks and made-up stories to divide the public's opinion and influence the case towards whatever their objectives were. Émile Zola, the famous French novelist, also entered the game in the Dreyfusard side by writing an open letter titled *J'accuse...!* to President Faure in a newspaper *L'Aurore*, for he was tired and outraged after major Esterhazy was acquitted on his court martial. He would end up being tried and convicted for criminal libel in 1898.

Piers Paul Read also succeeds in not making his account of events a mere dispute of Semitism vs. anti-Semitism. He takes time to give us profiles on everyone involved and tries to explain why each person took the decisions they did and what were their agendas. Also, being impartial, he goes through the book without creating vilans and never placing Dreyfus up in a pedestal. Although I couldn't help but *loathe* most of the people involved in this "miscarriage of justice", as the Dreyfus Affair became known.

Rating: aside the unfortunate subject (or maybe because of it), this is a great read. The 'plot' is so intricate I felt sometimes I was reading a great novel which was impossible to put down. 4 stars.

Marcia Van Camp says

Having only heard shortened versions in history class, my original understanding of the affair was that Dreyfus was wrongly convicted of espionage because someone had planted evidence against him in a trashcan. I knew he was in jail for about 10 years but was finally declared innocent but I did not know anything else.

What actually happened was so much worse that it almost seems unreal. Although no one originally set Dreyfus up, he was named as a possible suspect early on and those who were convinced of his guilt would not change their minds no matter how much evidence they were given to the contrary. They were so concerned that he might not be convicted that they started forging documents to prove his guilt. Not only that but when others tried to uncover the truth, documents were forged to make them look guilty of espionage as well. The General Staff of the Army was involved and they thought that it was better for Dreyfus to suffer than for the people to lose faith in the Army. Anti-Semitism played a heavy role as well and when Emile Zola wrote an article to name names in the scandal, riots and acts of violence against Jews occurred all over the country. Not even the discovery of the real spy, nor proof that documents had been forged seemed to stop the madness of the Army to continue to cover-up.

I was particularly impressed with Dreyfus's brother Mathieu who since his brother's conviction stopped at nothing to have him freed. He spent all of his time, energy and money at a time when very few outside of family believed Dreyfus was innocent. He is very inspiring and so is Dreyfus' wife Lucie who remained faithful and wrote him countless letters to try and sustain him through his horrible incarceration.

When I read the portion of the book title which said "The Scandal That Tore France in Two" I was a bit skeptical and thought that it was just a dramatic saying to sell the book. It was actually very painfully accurate. Governments rose and fell, long term alliances and enmities in high officials were created, and the international community was also involved. It was an incredible book and I am definitely the better for having read it.

My only critique is that the author in his efforts to fit the story into its historical setting seemed to feverishly cram names, facts, and so on, that were not very well explained especially in the beginning of the book. This information could have been pared down quite a bit. Also, to assume the reader speaks French and can understand sayings from the late 1800s is assuming a lot. It would have been extremely helpful to have the translations included in the book.

**This is the same author who wrote "Alive" which I read many years ago as well.
