In May 1940, German troops invaded France and stormed towards Paris. The government collapsed, the Third Republic came to an end and Philippe Pétain, the 84 year old hero of the First World War, became head of what was known as the French State (L’État français). The trauma of these events, and the anti-semitic policies that were subsequently enacted, has left an enduring legacy within cultural memory, shaping French politics and society to this day. The purpose of this illustrated talk is not to give an historical account of the Occupation and Resistance but rather to show how the events of 1940-45 remain an issue for historians, novelists, film directors and television producers. By exploring memories of the Occupation through such popular interpretations, we can understand anew the important place it still holds within the French psyche.

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