This book is about the memory of Vichy in contemporary France. It covers the period from the late 1990s up to the present. Although the period in question is only some fifteen years long, the subject is extraordinarily rich and complex. It is also a persistent source of controversy and scandal. The memory of Vichy engages vexing questions concerning the relationship between history and memory as well as the historical and cultural function and limits of fiction writing and film making. It also serves frequently as a flashpoint in French politics and political and cultural debates, generating crude and occasionally vicious caricatures, simplistic versions of the past, as well as dubious “history lessons.” From time to time, it even inspires humor. In January 2012, the presidential candidate of the *Nouveau Centre* party, Hervé Morin, provoked national hilarity by declaring that he had witnessed the Allied Landings in June 1944. Morin was born in 1961. As the internet site Voilà.fr quipped of the time-traveling candidate: “For a man born in 1961 to take part in the Allied landings of 1944 is a great achievement.”

But for the most part the memory of Vichy is a very serious subject, for any number of reasons. The word “Vichy” itself calls to mind both a repellent political regime and a moment in the nation’s history when, as then President Georges Pompidou put it euphemistically in the early 1970s, the French “did not like each other.” But there is of course much more to the Vichy moment than that. The nation experienced a devastating and humiliating national military defeat and occupation by the Germans. The first few years of that traumatic experience are brilliantly chronicled in Irène Némirovsky’s recently published posthumous masterpiece, *Suite française*, which appeared in 2004. In order to secure a favorable position in Hitler’s “New Europe,” the Vichy regime also actively pursued a policy of collaboration with Nazi Germany. As part of this effort, and for other reasons as well, French officials willingly participated in the implementation of the Nazi Final Solution in France. The outcome was, of course, the Holocaust or *Shoah*, to use the term preferred by the French. One of the victims was
Némirovsky herself, who died at Auschwitz in summer 1942. As the Liberation approached, the country descended into a “Franco-French Civil War” that continued under different guises through the postwar Purge of Vichy supporters and pro-Nazi collaborators, and beyond.

In recent years the word “Vichy” has come to evoke and to symbolize much more than a traumatic, specific, and completed moment in the nation’s past. It resonates as well with conscious and unconscious efforts, both collective and individual, to “erase” it, to repress its memory, or, at the least, to dismiss it as an aberration. Already in 1944, at the moment of the Liberation, Charles de Gaulle sought to accomplish these aims in political terms by declaring the regime itself “null and void.”

Conversely, the word “Vichy” also calls to mind national efforts to recall and to come to terms with the memory and implications of the so-called “Dark Years,” especially in the 1980s and 1990s. These efforts have not been easy. The criminal trials on charges of crimes against humanity in the 1980s and 1990s of a former Nazi, Klaus Barbie and two Frenchmen, Paul Touvier and Marice Papon (another Frenchman, René Bousquet, was murdered in 1993, before he could stand trial on similar charges) stirred considerable controversy and debate. The trials garnered national and international attention and raised grave concerns in many quarters about French law and its application to history. Similarly, President Francois Mitterrand’s 1994 effort as he was dying to acknowledge his own right wing past and his extended service to Vichy by revealing the details of this period of his life to his biographer Pierre Péan created a national scandal. The scandal was only made worse when Mitterrand went on national television to respond to questions about his “French Youth.”

During the course of the 1990s, Vichy and specifically the so-called “duty to memory” it inspired also focused attention on other traumatic moments in the nation’s past, from the Algerian War and World War I. (In fact, the former became a hot-button issue in the Papon Trial). In the new century, the “duty to memory” has expanded its reach to recall crimes from earlier centuries and different countries,
including the transatlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade beginning in the Fifteenth Century the Armenian genocide carried out by the Turks in 1915. In a number of ways these memories have become intertwined or pitted against each other in a “competition of the victims” and of memorial practices that often fragment history and stir controversy.

In contemporary fiction and also in film, Vichy has come to serve as shorthand, as a metaphor for evil, past and present. More troublingly perhaps, it also serves as a pretext, or context, for fiction’s challenge to the veracity and authority of History, with a capital “H.” And in politics as well as in political and cultural debates, its uses are often provocative and destructive, or exploitative and self-serving. Recalling the Vichy past can serve as a pretext for dismissing and vilifying. Conversely, it can also serve as a tool for pandering to public nostalgia by recalling the heroic memory of the struggle against Nazism, and even aligning oneself with that struggle. Witness Hervé Morin’s effort along these lines noted above!

What are the essential features or characteristics of the memory of in France today? I will argue in Corruptions of Memory that the defining features of that memory, as elaborated in public and political discourse, in analytical works by historians, philosophers, and others, and in important works of fiction and film that recall the Vichy past or imagine its legacies in the present can be summed up as follows:

1. The specificity of the memory of Vichy in public discourse, and the historical accuracy of the period it evokes, are under duress, in the first instance because the categories and discourses of history and memory have become dangerously conflated and confused in a variety of contexts. According to some critics, “memory” has in effect now taken precedence over “history,” fragmenting, diluting, and distorting it. Moreover, the history of the Vichy period and of World War II as generally understood and accepted as historically valid is increasingly challenged,
besieged, and “rewritten” by novels and films that revise and in some instances falsify that history in deliberately provocative and revisionist ways.

2. Largely as a result of the expansion of the “duty to memory” in the late 1990s and in the new century to include not only the victims of the Holocaust but that of other historical crimes and abuses, the memory of Vichy’s and the Nazis’ crimes are increasingly compared and conflated with other historic crimes in such a way as to obscure differences in motivation and practice. Already in his appropriately titled 1997 journal “Année des fantômes” (“The Year of the Ghosts”) Jacques Julliard lamented that the history of twentieth century France and Europe was increasingly becoming an undifferentiated “Jurassic Park of Horrors,” and that trend has not abated.

3. As a corollary to “2,” the trend begun in the 1980s and 1990s to come to terms legally and judicially with the memory of Vichy and French complicity in the Holocaust has continued and expanded in the new century with the passage of several controversial “memorial laws.” As noted, these laws address and criminalize not only moments and events from France’s past but other national traumatic memories as well. In retroactively defining and labeling past crimes “genocides” and “crimes against humanity” these laws, according to their critics at least, simplify and distort the past and foreclose critical and historical reflection in the present and future. In some instances, they also generate international tensions as well. At the moment of this writing, the French government is poised to make the denial of the 1915 Armenian genocide by the Turks punishable by fines and prison terms. The law has been passed by both houses of the French legislature, and awaits President Sarkozy’s signature. This gesture has infuriated the Turks, for whom the genocide itself is subject to debate.

4. Rather than refer in critically responsible ways to a particularly traumatic moment in France’s history and to the victims of crimes committed at the time, “Vichy” has increasingly become a
metaphor for evil, for moral and ethical decline, and even decadence in the present. It is used as a political or cultural cudgel of sorts to denounce politicians, intellectuals, and even perceived malaises in the national psyche. While this practice may—arguably—illuminate some aspects of the present, it does not clarify the past.

5. There has been an “ossification” of the memory of Vichy, along with the forms and imperatives associated with it, such that representations, commemorations and evocations of the Vichy past have become sterile, ritualistic, repetitive, and anachronistic. Memory is “repeating itself,” so to speak, and historical knowledge and understanding are none the better for it. By way of contrast with this situation, it should be recalled that in the early to mid-1990s the “Duty to Memory” and the activities and initiatives associated with it inspired a number of remarkable and comprehensive historical works that examined in exhaustive detail virtually every facet of French life in the “Dark Years.” Ambitious and exhaustive general histories, political histories, cultural and literary histories were published and discussed and debated widely in the media, and important and accomplished novels and films attracted large audiences. One would be hard pressed to make these claims today.

Because these changes are as pronounced as they are, it seems reasonable and appropriate to suggest that the “memory of Vichy,” and all that that expression has come to evoke, has undergone a significant transformation in the past decade or so. To follow Henry Rousso’s periodization model of the memory of Vichy and the “Dark Years” as initially proposed in *The Vichy Syndrome*, the memory of Vichy has entered a new “phase” which I will call the “Corruptions” phase. Rather than nurture and sustain historical clarity, knowledge, and understanding, the memory of Vichy along with the initiatives, practices, and imperatives it inspires directly or indirectly now tend to simplify, dilute and even pervert them. Rather than recall the past and illuminate it, memory invokes it in the form of caricatures and monstrosities that may titillate, but at the same time distance it from the present by endowing it with an
absolute moral evil in ways that are not recognizable, that do not seem part of the contemporary French scene. And because of this critical and crucial “distance” from the present the memory of Vichy and the Holocaust are powerless to inspire efforts to prevent or halt other genocides and abuses in the present. This, at least, is the perspective of a number of critics and historians writing in France today.

To be sure, this is not an optimistic or positive assessment of the memory of Vichy and the role it plays in a wide range of cultural, social, political, and even legal contexts in contemporary France. It runs counter, moreover, to a good deal of Anglo-American scholarship on the memory of Vichy and on ‘Memory” writ large in France. But I hope to show through a number of “case studies” involving politics, cultural criticism, the law, the novel and film that the current state of the memory of Vichy in contemporary France is as it is described here. On a more positive note, recognizing this state of affairs a number of writers-- novelists, philosophers, and historians-- have in recent works sought to engage with the memory of Vichy, and the weight of memory itself in France, in creative and compelling ways in order to imagine constructive uses of it in the present and future, on both individual and collective levels. In some instances, this involves novel writing that seeks, in effect, to restore the “reparative” to narrative, to paraphrase Mireille Rosello. It also involves diagnosing France’s “memory malaise” in such a way as to suggest ways to work through it, and beyond it. These “reparative” efforts will also be discussed in the pages that follow.

But before discussing the “case studies” as well at the “reparative” solutions mentioned above, it is necessary contextualize both by mapping the troubled terrain of History and Memory in France today. This will be the task of the Introduction.
History and memory are in trouble in France today. That is, history as an authoritative discourse and discipline as well as a rigorously established and generally accepted body of knowledge, and memory as a vibrant, faithful and focused imperative to remember and commemorate the victims of history’s most heinous crimes, in the first instance, the Nazis’ destruction of European Jewry. This, at least, is the opinion expressed in so many words by a growing number of prominent historians, philosophers, and intellectuals in their comments on a wide range of circumstances and events, as well as in more general diagnoses of the current malaise in French society and culture. The point is also made, at least implicitly, in recent novels and films by well-known writers and film makers. These works challenge accepted versions of historical truth, sometimes offering scandalously revisionist takes on the past or claiming to restore lost or suppressed memories of peoples, events, or traumatic episodes that the nation as a whole supposedly prefers to forget. Moreover, the critical and/or commercial success of these works suggests that --at least in the view of the philosopher Pascal Bruckner --the French nation (and more broadly Europe itself) is indulging in a seemingly endless period of historical and “memorial” navel contemplation that itself underscores an unwillingness or inability to deal with the present and future. To the extent that these works—and the cultural ethos as a whole—confirm an unhealthy obsession with the most terrible criminal moments of France’s recent past, they also point to the possibility that, despite all evidence to the contrary, the French have not yet thrown off the weight of their Catholicism, with its taste for self-flagellation and guilt. Except that now, the source of these feelings is not the moral failings or “original sin” of the individual, but the collective sins of the nation.

Bruckner’s provocative assessment of the root cause of France’s historical and “memorial” malaise is largely unique in its emphasis on guilt and the vestiges of France’s religious past. In fact, most
“diagnosticians” of the problem take a decidedly more “secular” approach, focusing as a rule on specific political, social, or cultural issues, events, or other indicators, in grounding their analyses. In some instances, these discussions underscore the loss of disciplinary distinctions and the changing role—and decline in authority and prestige—of the historian in French society today. Other commentators focus their attention on the blurring of boundaries between fictional and historical writing, especially in important and controversial recent novels. Still others, primarily historians, emphasize what they see as a troubling prevalence, even excess, of memorial initiatives and practices—a “surfeit of memory” as the American historian Charles Maier famously put it—that offer contradictory versions of historical truth and conflate and confuse memories and histories by pitting them against each other. For these critics especially, the so-called “duty to memory”– initially, the duty to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and French complicity in the Nazi Final Solution that dominated the 1990s-- has backfired badly, and in many ways. Finally, some commentators point to the deliberate manipulation or “instrumentalization” of the past to achieve political ends in the present. Often, the result is the dangerous decontextualization and distortion of the historical events and episodes being invoked. While this practice is hardly specific to the French situation—readers in this country will recall George W Bush and others, including Elie Wiesel, comparing Saddam Hussein to Hitler in the lead-up to the invasion and war in Iraq-- in France such dubious historical comparisons generally have a deeper resonance. This is the case perhaps because, so the claim goes, France lives its past more intensely than most other nations. But it is also true that, especially where the crimes of Nazism and decolonization are concerned, the French have to live with the knowledge of their complicity as a people in these crimes and abuses.

On the first score, where the diminishing role and authority of the historian is concerned, Henry Rousso has articulated the problem (s) in several recent essays. First, he notes that only a few decades ago the historian in France enjoyed a special, if not exalted place in French intellectual discourse. This was so, Rousso argues, because the collapse of the “utopian thought” of the 1970s generated an appetite for a
more truthful (véridique), concrete vision and version of History, that is, history written and validated by historians. Added to this new-found prestige and visibility was the fact that public interest was also turning to the darker moments of France’s and Europe’s recent past, and the historian was the best and most reliable guide. As Rousso phrases it, “the intellectual authority of the historian revealed itself to be all the more indispensable because French society, like that of other European countries, had undertaken the lengthy effort to acknowledge the most somber areas of its recent past, making of “memory” one of its most fetishized values, and of historian one of the privileged vectors of this anamnesis.” (19)

Times have change in recent years, according to Rousso. “Pluralist” representations of the past are now the order of the day, and are constantly being articulated by non-specialists, including journalists, film makers, “memory militants,” novelists, politicians and others, in accordance with their own needs and whims. These often dubious representations of the past are then given currency and credibility by their coverage in the media. As a result, the authority and status of the historian is constantly under fire. To avoid becoming superfluous, perhaps even to avoid extinction, the historian is required to embrace the media, to go on television or the radio, in short, to compete for an audience and for credibility with non-specialists. And the latter are often more adept at promoting their views in a mediatized context than are the historians themselves.

There are also other indicators of the “demotion” of the historian in French public discourse in recent years, especially where certain memorial activities and initiatives are involved. Rousso notes that during the 1990s, when distinguished historians were called to testify at the trials for crimes against humanity of Vichy officials Paul Touvier in 1994 and Maurice Papon in 1997-98—the so-called “trials for memory”- - they were invited to testify not as expert witnesses, as were, for example, psychiatrists. Historians were called as simple witnesses, offering their “opinion” like any other witness. Given that the value of
the input of the historian, who knew better than most what had actually transpired fifty years earlier under Vichy and the Nazis, this was quite strange, not to say ludicrous.

More recently, Rousso notes that another practice has served as a reminder of the decreasing authority and significance of the historian, especially in relation to memorial practices and undertakings. This is the passage by the French legislature of the so-called “memorial laws” that criminalize particular traumatic events in the nation’s, and Europe’s past, and in some instances make the denial of these events punishable with fines and imprisonment. While often laudable in their intent, these laws in effect impose a specific and simplistic historical interpretation on the event or practice in question, and in the process risk undermining future historical inquiry. Rousso recounts that when a group of distinguished historians met with the President of the National Assembly to protest these laws in 2008, they were told that if they wished to be heard they should “organize a lobby,” like other groups and constituencies. (6)

If the loss of status and authority of the historian in the public forum is both a contributing factor and symptom of the current intellectual and cultural malaise in France, another related phenomenon concerns the “factionalization” of the past, the rewriting and revising of history in contemporary fiction. Eschewing old-fashioned “historical fiction,” a number of important writers working today have chosen to write novels that in some instances presume not merely to rival but indeed to replace historical writing. These works supposedly offer a more accurate and indeed more truthful representation of the past. As if the historian were not beleaguered enough, the novelist now seeks to usurp his role.

Evidence of this trend can be found first and foremost in the remarkable success or, perhaps more accurately, the succès de scandale of two novels published since 2005, the America-born novelist Jonathan Littell’s massive fictional “memoir” of an unrepentant SS officer, Les bienveillantes (The Kindly Ones) published in in France in 2006 (and in English translation in this country in 2009) and Yannick Haenel’s Jan Karski, based on the wartime experiences of the real life Polish resistance fighter, Jan
Karski. Not long after the publication of Les bienveillantes, in an interview with the author Pierre Nora praised Littell for re-contextualizing and essentially “re-historicizing” the Shoah for the French by replacing it in its proper context, the broader European conflict in the east. For Nora, in the French collective conscience the Holocaust had been “de-historicized” by being too directly, too often, and too exclusively linked to Vichy. Commenting on the interview in question, Henry Rousso points out that Nora also praised Littell for essentially surpassing the work of all previous historians by probing the “psychological mechanism” of the Nazi executioner, something the historians had collectively been unable to do. The result, according to Nora, was that Littell had exposed “another,” presumably deeper historical truth. As Rousso argues, Nora’s comments here reduce the historian to the status of a mere “documentalist,” the richest meaning of whose sources eludes him.

If Littell was—in Nora’s view at least—enhancing and perhaps “completing” the history of World War II and the Holocaust by bringing to light some of its more profound truths, Yannick Haenel was revising it, and in very dangerous ways, according to some critics. Among other liberties taken with the historical record, Haenel chose to portray Franklin D. Roosevelt and other American political leaders as being fundamentally indifferent to the fate of Europe’s Jews during World War II, while at the same time betraying the Polish nation in selling it out to Soviet demands at the end of the war. Moreover, according to Claude Lanzmann, in whose film Shoah the real Jan Karski is interviewed at length, Haenel had himself betrayed the historical Jan Karski in attributing attitudes and statements to him that were uncorroborated by anything Karski had said or written.

Both Littell’s Les Bienveillantes and Haenel’s Jan Karski and the scandals they generated will be discussed at greater length later in this study. But the broader and, for some, more troubling issues raised by the two novels are not confined to their respective and specific challenges to history and to the limits of fiction writing. This at least is the impression created by the recent attention paid to these
issues in monographs and essays, most notably perhaps in the Summer 2011 issue of the prestigious intellectual review, *Le débat*. The title of the issue, “L’histoire saisie par la fiction” – “History seized (or apprehended) by fiction” gives a clear idea of the dimensions of the situation in the view of *Le débat*’s editors. And the titles of many of the essays included, written by distinguished historians, literary critics, and novelists confirm not only their concurrence with this assessment but with the complexity of the issue as well as the dangers the phenomenon ultimately poses, certainly where the discourse and discipline of history are concerned. Titles like “History and the novel: where are the boundaries?”; “The narrative of the novelists, the narrative of the historians”; “Fiction and facts: the perils of ‘faction’”; “The fragility of history is called literature”; and “History and literature, symptom of the crisis of discipline” all acknowledge the challenge to and potential erasure or destruction of what were until recently generally seen as secure and even sacrosanct disciplinary boundaries. Several of the titles seem to go further, betraying an anxiety over the imminent “pollution” of the discourse of history by fiction, and implicitly at least, the loss of real historical knowledge itself.

The actual content of the essays confirms both of these impressions, and proposes as well different reasons why and/or how the situation has come about. For Pierre Nora, the reality is that the disciplinary boundaries between history and fiction have been largely nonexistent for some thirty to forty years. The ground for this has been prepared, Nora writes, by the kind of history writing championed by Lucien Fevre and the Annales School, which “relied, like the novel, on a narrative, on a plot, on the deployment of characters, on the dramatic organization of things, on the art of portraiture.” It has also been prepared by the varied aspirations of fiction writing itself. In the ambitious novelistic projects of writers like Roger Martin du Gard and Marcel Proust, it has sought to comprise what Nora calls a “total history.” In popular works dealing with World War I like Henri Barbusse’s *Fire*, it has skated dangerously close to journalism, at least, Nora asserts, in the eyes of figures like André Malraux.
But these observations concerning a hypothetical long term trend do not prevent Nora from stressing the novelty, or more accurately, the inauguration of an entirely new stage in the convergence of history and fiction, with the publication of works like Les bienveillantes and Jan Karski. In his essay Nora reiterates his praise of Littell’s novel in particular, labeling it “a major offensive of literature which has set up camp in the inner sanctum of history, and has seized upon its most sacred subject, the Nazi genocide” (11). Moreover, the very monstrosity of Littell’s novel captures the monstrosity of the historical phenomenon it depicts in a way that no historian ever could. And the novel’s “hallucinatory realism” makes episodes like the Nazi massacre of Jews at Babi Yar “come to life” in ways the historian cannot match.

If Nora seems sanguine if not enthusiastic about the novelist’s conquest and occupation of the historian’s terrain-- at least in the case of Les bienveillantes – other contributors to the issue seem less comfortable with this state of affairs, or imminent eventuality. In his essay the British historian Anthony Beevor denounces the “rampant” abuse of “faction” (the word is self-explanatory) in novels, films, and television programs. Beevor attributes this disturbing and recent phenomenon to the fact that we now live in a “‘post-literate world, where image is queen’ and where, moreover, the demands of history and the demands of the entertainment industry are fundamentally at odds. The result is that novels, television programs and movies that claim to be based in reality often grossly distort the facts in the name of plot and dramatic effect. He cites the example of a British series Cambridge Spies in which the notorious spy and traitor Kim Philby supposedly learns that British government knows about but refuses to divulge to their Soviet allies the imminent German invasion in summer 1941. The fact is that the British warned Stalin repeatedly that a Nazi invasion was at hand, but Stalin chose to ignore the warning.

In a “post-literate society,” Beevor continues, “where more and more people have trouble distinguishing fact from fiction,” a limitless field is now opening up for the triumph of “stupidity.” (39). He imagines the
possibility a thriller along the lines of *The Da Vinci Code* in which the Holocaust is presented as a hoax. Even if the movie acknowledges that its premise is fictional, the numerous legal efforts to deny its representations or block its screening will only convince a global legion of skeptics that it is “true” precisely because of efforts to suppress it. And this does not count the millions in the near and far East who are already convinced that the Holocaust is a lie foisted by the West and Israel and the world to justify the existence of the latter and its aggressive policies toward Arab nations.

To be sure, Beevor’s comments are not specific to France today. In fact most of his examples of “faction” are chosen from British or American sources. But the hybrids of fact and fiction he describes, and over which he expresses considerable concern, obviously have their French counterparts, and Beevor’s anxieties are also echoed in the reflections of the other contributors to the issue. One of the latter, Antoine Compagnon, appears in fact to disagree with Beevor’s view that these hybrids are an international phenomenon, that they can be counted among the noxious by-products of a globalized, “post-literate society.” For Compagnon, the phenomenon is “particularly French” and—disagreeing with Nora when the latter asserts that the phenomenon dates back thirty or forty years—Compagnon also asserts that it is “relatively new.” (62) For him, it dates back only a decade or so, to the beginning of the new century. It is, moreover, in Compagnon’s view less symptomatic of a generalized social affliction than of “the state of uncertainty that prevails today in all the disciplines associated with the humanities as well as the social sciences.” This state of affairs is attributable to “brutal mutations in the organization of higher education and research in France. (65)” Faced with this disciplinary crisis, researchers “no longer know who can, and must, speak about any subject.” And fiction writers, according to Compagnon, find themselves in the same boat, lacking sure and reliable reference points themselves. But this also means that they are essentially free to write as historians, or in the place thereof, and the problem becomes less one of historical documentation than of literary ethics: what constitutes a legitimate and responsible representation of the past? The burden of the novelist, Compagnon adds, is
especially heavy when he or she is writing about a topic as freighted with ethical and moral issues as the Holocaust.

Compagnon’s remarks concerning the risks and responsibilities of the novelist who writes about the Holocaust brings the discussion full circle to the extent that, as virtually all the contributors to the issue of *Le débat* point out, the “history” being “apprehended [besieged?] by fiction” is primarily the history of World War II and the Holocaust. For those contributors discussing the French context alone, the novels they discuss include obviously *Les bieveillantes* and *Jan Karski*, but they also include the young novelist Laurent Binet’s *HHhH*, the “fictionalized” story of the SS leader Reinhard Heydrich and the Czechoslovak resistance fighters who assassinated him in June 1942. And while for the most part Beevor does not discuss French fiction (with the exception of brief references to Littell’s novel), he does acknowledge the centrality of World War II in discussing “faction,” the prime offenders being American films, and Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* in particular.

Why World War II and the Holocaust in this context? There are of course, multiple and complicated reasons that are literary and historical in nature, as well as psychological, moral, and ethical. Beevor’s answer is that “we are living today in a post-military society, in a safe and secure milieu where personal risks and moral decisions no longer have any place.” (30) But the memory of the war is still very much present in the memories of those who experienced it, in commemorations, etc. And, Beevor argues, it is also present for the younger generation who, despite being spared the difficulties, hardships, and moral quandaries that the older generation faced, wonder nevertheless how they would have reacted if confronted with similar circumstances. Hence their fascination, their “nostalgia” for a war they did not experience.

Beevor may be overly optimistic in his assessment of the reasons for the younger generation’s interest in World War II. But within the French context he is certainly right about the interest on the part of the
younger generation, in that writers like Littell, Haenel, and Binet are fairly young, and their works do reflect a fascination with the hardships, quandaries, and especially the horrors of the conflict. But in the cases of Litell and Binet, both of whom are quoted in the issue of *le débat*, the reasons they give for their own interest, their fascination, with World War II are somewhat different, or at least somewhat narrower in their focus. In an exchange with Beevor included in the issue Littell states that there is no more fundamental question to be faced today—by the *historians*—than to understand the nature and motivation of the *bourreaux*, the torturers. Great works by Robert Antelme, Primo Levi, and David Rousset have explored the perspective and mindset of the victim, Littell adds, but those of the torturer remain “extremely mysterious.” Hence the inspiration for *Les bienveillantes* as a literary work but above all as a work of *history*.

For Laurent Binet, who contributed an essay entitled “The Marvelous Real” to the issue, the principal fascination of World War II, certainly for the contemporary writer, is that it is “our Trojan War.” It serves as a “reference point, a reference, an inexhaustible source of narratives, a collection of epics and tragedies, an epic and tragic summit. I could add that it is, like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a compilation of myths that are at once autonomous and linked among themselves. Whatever one is looking for, one can find it in the Second World War, from fairy tales to racy stories.” (82) Despite his decidedly “literary” take on why World War II fascinates the writer of fiction, Binet’s own novel, as will be seen, is very much engaged with the hardships and moral and ethical quandaries alluded to by Beevor and also by Compagnon.

In their comments as to why World War II fascinates contemporary French novelists, other contributors to the *débat* issue offer different reasons that have more to do with the current state of French fiction than they do with a fascination with the war itself. For Patrick Boucheron, for example, French novelists today who wish to find readers are faced with a fundamental choice between two very different types of
writing and subject matter. Either they can “turn to history” and write about a “great (and preferably tragic) historical figures” and their times, or they can write about their own meager and paltry existences, caught up in the humdrum of postmodern life. For Mona Ozouf, the French reading public is tiring of the latter, which she describes as “bloodless novels that have no link with historical or sociological reality,” and which are the products and symptoms of a “skeptical and discouraged art form.” If Ozouf is right, the table is set for the new historically “engaged” works like Les bienveillantes and Jan Karski—and the historical, ethical, and moral problems that accompany them.

If fiction’s recent challenge to history as a discipline and as a secure and reliable body of knowledge is troubling to many, the extraordinary growth and flourishing of “memory”- of memorial and commemorative practices, endeavors, and imperatives or “duties,” legal and otherwise—constitutes arguably even a greater challenge. To be sure, the expansion and indeed predominance of memory—as well as concerns over its impact—are hardly a recent or entirely new phenomenon, specific to the Twenty-first century and the past decade. In his aforementioned essay, “A Surfeit of memory?” published in 1993, Charles Maier already worried that a postmodern taste for and even addiction to memory marked a retreat from the more rigorous practice and discipline of history. For Maier, memory constituted an inferior form of knowledge, as compared with history. Memories have only to be “retrieved and relived, not explained,” whereas history, as written by historians presumably, “must reconstruct causal sequences” and “explain events and their antecedents.” Maier warned that memory “must be kept in its place, as servant, not master.” It must be understood as a “reflection on experience, and not experience as a whole.” (151)

Maier’s critique of memory as very briefly sketched out here has recently been echoed and amplified, and in more forceful and indeed dire terms, by Tony Judt in Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century, published in 2008. For Judt, the danger Maier envisaged—that memory would
assume an increasingly prominent role, and perhaps supplant history—has already been realized. We are living, he argues, in the era of “mis-memory,” where the “lessons” of the past are constantly invoked but are in fact “ignored and untaught.” (2) To be sure, the recent past has been “memorialized... everywhere: shrines, inscriptions, ‘heritage sites’ even historical theme parks...” (3) But the problem is that commemoration of this sort is entirely selective: “The overwhelming majority of places of official twentieth-century memory are either avowedly nostalgio-triumphalist—praising famous men and celebrating famous victories—or else, increasingly, opportunities for the acknowledgment and recollection of selective suffering.” (4). And it is the latter development, apparently, which Judt finds most disturbing: “The twentieth-century is... on the path to becoming a moral memory palace: a pedagogically serviceable Chamber of Historical Horrors whose way stations are labeled ‘Munich’ or ‘Pearl Harbor,’ ‘Auschwitz’ or ‘Gulag,’ ‘Armenia’ or ‘Bosnia’ or ‘Rwanda’ or ‘9-11.’” These names moreover, serve as “a sort of supererogatory coda, a bloody post script for those who would forget the lessons of the century or who never properly learned them.” (4) To the extent that history exists, to the extent that it is apprehended by the “common man,” it is available only— or at least primarily— in fragmented form because of its direct linkage to specific crimes and traumas. These, in turn, are linked to specific nationalities or ethnicities: those that were the victims of the crime, or experienced the traumas. History thus becomes a “mosaic” that “does not bind us to a shared past” but rather “separates us from it.” It has meaning and substance only in its particularism. The net effect of all this, Judt laments, is that “a world just recently lost is already half forgotten.” (95)

What of the French context? As Jean-Philippe Mathy has written recently, discussions of memory as well as “controversies about recent political uses of the past gathered momentum in the years leading up to the bicentennial of the French Revolution of 1789” (145). With the Bicentennial itself, the Revolution became a major locus of these debates, with numerous polemical interventions by Francois Furet, among many others. But as the 1990s got underway, the focus of discussions as well as debates over
memory shifted primarily to the crimes of Nazism and to French complicity in the Holocaust. Moreover, with the collapse of Communism and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the crimes of Communist regimes, and Stalinism in particular, also became linked to Nazism’s crimes under the rubric of the “crimes of totalitarianism.” The linkage itself would become increasingly problematic in France over the course of the decade, culminating in late fall 1997 with the explosive and vitriolic debate over Black Book of Communism, to be discussed shortly.

Under any circumstances, as Tzvetan Todorov wrote in a remarkable 1995 essay, Les Abus de la mémoire, it was precisely the fact that Nazism and Stalinism, both totalitarian regimes, attempted to scrupulously efface all traces of their crimes that made remembering them necessary and indeed essential in the first place. The act of recovery became, in effect, a moral and ethical imperative, an obligation to the memory of the millions of victims of the crimes, an effort to prevent them from being “killed twice” in being consigned to l’oubli total. Memory thus became strongly associated with virtue in contemporary democratic societies which, moreover, had to struggle as well against other social and cultural agents of forgetfulness: a superabundance and constant barrage of information, coupled with inevitable historical and cultural “dumbing-down” fostered by a society devoted to pleasure and consumption. (12-13)

But, Todorov warned, the obligation to remember, the “duty to memory” has its own limitations and pitfalls. In the first place, “memory” itself is often misunderstood. By its very nature it is selective, working in practice off of the interaction of “conservation” and “erasure.” So the opposite of memory is not, and cannot be “forgefulness” or l’oubli, as is commonly assumed. But we tend to overlook this distinction in a culture that readily misapplies the term “memory” as, for example, when we refer to a computer’s retention of information as “memory.” This is in fact a misnomer, because the computer’s storage process lacks the key ingredient of memory: selection.
Along similar lines, Todorov writes, contemporary society also tends to overlook the fundamental distinction between memory as a process of “recovery,” of “recovering the past,” and memory as a moral or political imperative to act in the present. There is no automatic connection between the two processes, but because they are essentially merged or fused in the public mind, the recovered memory becomes synonymous with the imperative which is subsequently attributed to it. If the recovered memory is put to a good or positive use, there is no problem. But all too often it is made to justify crimes, wars, and even genocides. Todorov offers the example of the New World tribes described by Amerigo Vespucci which fought incessantly not over disputes in the present but rather over past hatreds recalled. He cites as well an example from contemporary Europe, and the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. As justification of their crimes committed against Bosnians and Croatians in the present, the Serbs recalled relatively recent crimes committed against them by these enemies during World War II (with the crimes of the pro-Nazi Croatian Ustacha, for example) and more ancient crimes committed by the Turks. Abuses like those committed by the Serbs in the name of past wrongs serve as reminders that the automatic linkage of memory to a specific, current imperative can have dangerous and indeed catastrophic consequences. But this fact is often ignored in contemporary Western democracies that habitually associate memory with virtue, for the reasons discussed.

Given this state of affairs, the crucial question for Todorov becomes how to “distinguish in advance between the good and bad uses of the past.” (29) Ordinarily, these uses are only judged or determined in retrospect. But, Todorov argues, it is possible to avoid being limited to ex post facto judgments if one takes into account the distinction between what he describes as the “forms of reminiscence” being deployed. According to Todorov, the memory recovered can be read “literally” or “exemplarily,” and the difference is crucial.
If memory is read literally, it becomes an “intransitive fact, leading nowhere beyond or outside of itself.” Todorov explains:

The associations that are linked to [literal memory] are in direct contiguity with it: I uncover the causes and consequences of the act [or injustice, or crime] remembered, I determine the identities of all those who can be associated with the initial author of my suffering and I accuse them in turn, I establish a direct continuity between the person I was then and the person I am at present, or I establish a similar direct linkage between my people then and now, and I spread the impact and consequences of the trauma to all the moments of my [or my people’s] existence. (30)

The implications, or consequences of reading (a traumatic) memory literally are not difficult to foresee. The individual or group in question remains mired in the past, they focus on their sufferings alone, and their lives are reduced to making accusations and demanding retribution or compensation for the crimes committed against them. For Todorov, obviously, “literal memory” is a blight on a personal as well as on a societal level. And it is this kind of memory, moreover, that is all too characteristic of the surge or “cult of memory” which, he adds later, overwhelmed Europe and especially France “at the end of the millennium.” (51)

But there is a way to avoid the pitfalls and dangers associated with reading memory “literally,” and that is to read it “exemplarily”:

Without denying the singularity the memory of event [injustice, or crime] in question, once recovered I decide to use it as one instance among others in a more general category, and I use it to understand new situations, with different agents. The consequences of this approach are two-fold: on the one hand, like the work or analysis of mourning, I disarm the power of the suffering caused by the memory in domesticating and marginalizing it. On the other hand—and this is where our conduct ceases to be purely private and enters into the public sphere—I open up the memory to analogy and to
generalization, I make of it an *exemplum* and draw a lesson from it: the past thus becomes a principle of action in the present. In this case, the associations that I apprehend are based on resemblance and not on contiguity, and I am no longer concerned so much with assuring my own identity as I am justifying the analogies I make. (31)

In this way, memory becomes liberating instead of stifling or crippling, according to Todorov. The exemplary usage of memory allows one to use the past in the present, so to speak, “to use the lessons drawn from past injustices suffered to combat those which are occurring today, to abandon one’s solipsism and move toward the other.” (32).

In *Les abus de la mémoire* Todorov offers several historical examples of the « exemplary » use of memory. The most notable of these, certainly where the memory of the crimes of Hitlerism and Stalinism are concerned, were the efforts of David Rousset to apply the lessons of his experiences as a political prisoner at Buchenwald to the Gulag. Specifically, in 1949, Rousset published a petition asking his fellow former deportees to Nazi camps to undertake an investigation of Soviet camps that were still functioning. Rousset’s call, Todorov states, had the effect of a bomb. French Communists including many fellow deportees denounced Rousset, and many denied the very existence of the Soviet camps. Rousset responded that it was the duty of his fellow deportees to expose Stalinism’s crimes in the name of what they had experienced in the Nazi camps, and this was the price they needed to pay for having been among the fortunate who survived.

Had Rousset “privileged literal memory,” Todorov continues, he “would have spent the rest of his life submerged in his own past, licking his wounds, and nursing his resentments against those who had inflicted an unforgettable offense on him.” (44) Instead, Rousset chose to translate the memory of his past suffering into positive action in the present. His action was both difficult and courageous, and in the
end it benefitted him as a human being as much as it did those suffering in the present. In this case, memory of past crimes served the cause of justice in the present.

Despite his unalloyed admiration for Rousset and his admiration for the actions the memory of Rousset’s sufferings at Buchenwald inspired, Todorov is not unaware of the fact that exemplary memory has its own potential pitfalls, its own dangers. If the memory of the crimes of Nazism can be “applied,” so to speak, to the crimes of Stalinism, why should it not be applied more universally to all human suffering, to all injustices? For Todorov, the danger is clear. If applied in this fashion, exemplary memory risks becoming hopelessly diluted, being transformed into a “universal analogy” according to which “all cats in distress in the night are grey.” (46) So if exemplary memory is to be valid, if it is to be functional and responsible, it must be applied in a “limited fashion; it cannot make disappear the nature of the facts involved, it must place them in proximity to each other and make comparisons that emphasize resemblances and differences.” (46)

Todorov’s dissection of memory, its nature, dangers and “abuses” in the early 1990s in Les Abus de la mémoire is remarkable for its precision and clarity. Moreover, its proposals for a positive use of “exemplary memory” anticipate recent notions and representations of memory’s “reparative” potential on a personal and collective level, to be discussed in detail later. But Todorov’s 1995 analysis does not explore in detail another danger associated of the “cult” or the duty” to memory in the 1990s in France and that is its capacity to grossly distort, the past, the specific history being recalled. One glaring example of this occurred a few years after Les Abus de la mémoire was published, during France’s most spectacular “trial for memory,” the 1997-1998 trial for crimes against humanity of Maurice Papon in Bordeaux. In the wake of that trial, Jean de Maillard published an essay in Le débat entitled A quoi sert le procès Papon? (“The Papon trial: to what Ends?) in which he criticized the trial as a colossal failure on both moral and legal grounds. But Maillard was especially critical of the trial on historical grounds. The
vision and understanding of the history of World War II and Nazism it conveyed were patently false, he argued, and this was especially egregious, given exalted claims made by some that the trial had served or would serve a valuable pedagogical function in exposing the realities of the Vichy period and Nazism to the nation. According to Maillard, the simplistic, simple-minded and patently false historical “lesson” given by the Papon trial could be summed up as follows:

“all that existed, on the one side were the Nazis and their accomplices, all of whose efforts were devoted to the elimination of the Jews and their friends, who constituted the other side. And for all those [living at the time], no one could escape the obligation of choosing one side or the other, with a full and complete understanding of the stakes involved, and no one could escape the consequences of his or her choice. (36-37)

In every way, obviously, this scenario runs counter to the complexities of the historical realities of the war. It insists most crucially on the absolute transparency of the Holocaust, which it places at the very center of the conflict, and from the beginning of the war. In so doing it ignores any semblance of a plausible historical timeline, and mischaracterizes an event as transparent and compelling to all which, as Maillard observed, “could only have occurred through the indifference of some and the ignorance of others.” Maillard concluded: “It is a strange and disturbing vision of History, this Manichaeism imposed ex post facto for expiatory purposes. (37)

Recently, in his 2010 essay Memory as a Remedy for Evil Todorov, also looked back at the false understanding of history conveyed in the Papon trial as well as the other two French trials for crimes against humanity, albeit while approaching the problem from a different direction. According to Todorov, the problem in France (and elsewhere as well) is that memory was and is now being deployed in a variety of guises and circumstances as an instrument to “deliver us from evil.” This is accomplished by casting the traumas in the past in the role of absolute evil and then distancing ourselves from them in
the present by recalling and dealing with them as such. Thus, memory serves as a kind of moral prophylactic to safeguard us and prevent evil’s reoccurrence today. This perspective, Todorov continues, was explicitly articulated very recently by French President Nicholas Sarkozy when in 2008 he declared that “the memory and the transmission of the Shoah” constituted “our strongest weapon against racism and anti-Semitism, and our only protection against the awakening of the foul beast and a repeat of events” [emphasis mine].” In keeping with this claim, Sarkozy decreed that “starting in the Fall of 2008 all eleven–year-old school children be ‘entrusted with the memory of one of the 11,000 French child victims of the Shoah.’” Sarkozy’s gesture was criticized on a number of grounds, some political and others psychological (was it healthy mentally for an eleven year old to be forcibly confronted with the nightmare of the Holocaust?), but Todorov’s objection was on historical grounds: “the president’s project evidenced a certain measure of contempt for history as a teaching subject since it isolated a past event from its content and was content with turning it into a starting point for an emotional identification.”

What of the trials for crimes against humanity? Here again, historical understanding was compromised by memory’s role in identifying and coming to terms with a past characterized as evil incarnate. In this instance, however, French law governing crimes against humanity helped facilitate the process: “Since crimes against humanity are the only criminal offenses that do not fall under the statute of limitation, the defendants were necessarily regarded as entirely different from other criminals, all the more so from the rest of humanity.” If criminals against humanity could not be considered part of humanity, then their motives and actions could not be explained in human terms, and therefore they remained outside history and historical comprehension. The same problem arises, according to Todorov, when Hitler is depicted in a movie: “the question regularly arises of the risks of seeing him as a human being, as belonging to the same species as we do.”
In its insistence on a crucial linkage between the cult of memory and contemporary vestiges of religious faith and belief, Todorov’s analysis in Memory as a Remedy for Evil recalls Pascal Bruckner’s perspective, although in different ways and with different implications for the present. But while compelling as a general explanation to the problem of memory in France over the last twenty years and its deleterious impact on historical understanding, it does not account for another obstacle memory has placed in the way of history. That is the “fragmentation” or “particularization” of memory, particularly in the new century, and the consequent use of memory as a “pluralized identity card.” In a lecture given at the Mémorial Museum in Caen Normandy in June 2011 entitled “The Memory of Twentieth Century Wars, Questions for the Twenty First Century,” Jean –Pierre Rioux argued that memory in recent years in France has been transformed. Memory is now “particularized” and even “individualized.” It has, moreover, become a source of identity and pride, hence, an identity card of sorts and a badge of honor that gives “individuals, families, groups, communities, ‘locals’ as well as ‘cosmopolitans’ the sentiment of being able, through memory, to establish an immediate and direct rapport with their past and with the passage of time which is both moving and nourishing to them.” But this means, of course, that memory it is no longer collective on a national scale, no longer capable of binding the French nation as a whole together.

What are the sources of this transformation of memory? The first, according to Rioux, is the evolution from “‘never again’ (where the Holocaust is concerned) and the consequent ‘duty to memory’ as formulated by camp survivors after 1945, to a broader indictment of the past in the name of ‘crimes against humanity’ and ‘human rights’ which have been universalized in concert with each other.” Together, the latter have placed “particular weight on new episodes from the past where the same Evil proliferated and which are terribly historical and contemporary at the same time. The Holocaust still holds a central place due to its centrality established in previous years, but the Algerian War, the Great
War of 1914-1918, colonization, and the slave trade are now also considered endlessly and forever traumatic.”

The second source of memory’s metamorphosis is essentially a loss of historicity in contemporary societies, including France, which has resulted in a loss of contact, so to speak, with the fil du temps, the thread of time. Without this “red thread that ties the past to the present and future, without progress or the promise of better things to come, without relative social harmony, without rituals and binding symbolic practices that define generations and the stages of one’s lifetime, the motor of collective memory catches the flu, and collective memory therefore runs the risk of being neither nourishing nor subject to discussion and debate.”

The final source of memory’s transformation according to Rioux is essentially a spatial disruption that runs parallel to the loss of historicity, according to which national borders as well as mental spaces become fluid and porous. As a result, a consensual, superficial, and global “culture mainstream” takes hold everywhere, and individual and collective life are reduced to a “cosmopolitanism of consumption and an individualism devoted to satisfactions of the moment.” Society loses any semblance of a heritage, it becomes orphaned, and “the horizontality of a present without borders carries the day over the verticality of the passage of time.” To sum up: contemporary (French) society “is losing its [collective] memory” to paraphrase the title of Rioux’s 2006 book, and with it, its grasp on the nation’s history as well.

To be sure, Rioux’s assessment of France’s memorial --and historical --malaise may strike some as overly nostalgic and pessimistic, and perhaps too general as well. But any number of studies concerning memory in France in the twenty-first century concur with Rioux’s assessment that memory has become fragmented, serving individual or group needs and aims and often proposing competing not to say contradictory versions of the past—as well as different pasts-- which ultimately do not serve the
ends of history, but undermine it instead. As one example, in *Melancholy Politics* Jean-Philippe Mathy discusses the competing legacies, memories, and memorials relating to the Algerian war which have emerged primarily in southern France since 2000. The groups represented who demand their *droit de mémoire* or “right to memory” include *pieds noirs* (French settlers who returned to France after the war), *harkis* (those Algerians who fought with the French), FLN or Algerian Liberation Front adherents, and even defenders of the OSS, *Organisation Armée Sécrète*, the terrorist organization that tried to keep Algeria “French” and carried out crimes, including attempts on the life of Charles de Gaulle. Needless to say, these groups articulate and champion widely divergent versions of the past, and some have been accused of historical revisionism and “negationism.” Those on the far right have even been accused of the “lepenization” of history, a reference of course to the far right National Front leader Jean-Marie le Pen, himself guilty of glibly offering dangerous and offensive historical falsehoods on occasion. Under any circumstances these divergent and frequently distorted or false versions of the past often go unchallenged by the state which, as Mathy points out, in this instance at least is reluctant to intervene, as it wishes to “project an image of impartiality and neutrality in the management of competing needs, rights, requests, and expectations of lobbies that make up a liberal-pluralist society.” (153-4)

If the Algerian conflict has inspired and continues to inspire what Mathy labels “memory wars” that often serve the ends of the present at the expense historical knowledge and understanding, other conflicts and traumas in modern French and European history that have been the subject to similar memorial activities, pressures, and controversies have suffered the same fate. History pays the bill for memory here as well. As one example, in *14-18: Understanding the Great War* Stéphane Audouin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker argue that during the 1998 commemorations and celebrations of the end of World War I numerous commentators on the events themselves created controversy by proposing a “politically correct” version of the war according to which all the combatants were depicted as essentially “non-consenting victims.” The “only true heroes of the war,” moreover, were the mutineers
of 1917. And the Nivelle Offensive of the same year was described by one commentator as the ‘first crime against humanity,” although in French as well as international law, there is no justification for this claim. (2)

Indicative of an unprecedented “failure to treat history as History,” according Becker and Audouin-Rouzeau, commentaries of this sort turned historical as well as psychological realities on their ear. They ignore the fact that many if not most went off to war willingly in 1914, and on both sides, albeit in the misguided assumption that the conflict would end quickly. They also ignore the fact that there were “heroes” other than those who mutinied. And in painting all the combatants as “non-consenting victims” they comfort the modern sensibilities of the descendants, who prefer not to think of their ancestors as killers. But in so doing, they “bury” the essential question raised by the war, which is “why and how millions of Europeans and Westerners acquiesced in the war of 1914-18.” This remains a “taboo subject.”(3)

Appearing in the fall of 1997 as the trial for crimes against humanity of Maurice Papon was getting underway, The Black Book of Communism, also challenged history in the name of commemoration, of memory. A collective historical work written by historians and documenting the crimes of Communist regimes world-wide, the Black Book was also intended to serve a commemorative function in that, in cataloguing these crimes, it paid homage to the millions and millions of victims of these regimes.

Although the individual chapters were scrupulously documented and researched, the Black Book as a whole became a focal point in France’s “memory wars” because the volume’s editor, Stéphane Courtois, wrote an introduction in which he compared and equated Stalin’s crimes to Hitler’s crimes, and labeled both “crimes against humanity.” To quote Courtois’ most provocative (and oft-cited) comparison, ‘the death of a Ukrainian Kulak child deliberately starved by the policies of Stalinism ‘is
equal to’ the death of a Jewish child in the Warsaw ghetto, deliberately starved by the Nazis.” (Needless to say, the comparison avoids the thornier comparison of the Kulak child starved over time and the Jewish child shot by Einsatzgruppen members, or gassed at Auschwitz). And he added cagily, ‘the genocide of ‘class’ may be tantamount to the genocide of ‘race.’” Courtois went on to claim that, purely in terms of the numbers of victims, Communism was in fact worse than Nazism, tallying up the highly dubious figure of one hundred million killed by Communism, as opposed to “only” fifteen million killed by the Nazis.

As several of Courtois’s co-authors, including most notably Nicholas Werth argued in the controversy that raged in the media following the book’s publication, not only were Courtois’s figures for the numbers of victims grossly inaccurate, but the comparison of Kulak and Jewish children and ‘class’ genocide and ‘race’ genocide defied and in fact erased moral distinctions crucial to history and historical understanding. Moreover, the timing of the publication of the Black Book and the controversy itself made the entire affair ripe for political manipulation or “instrumentalization.” In an effort to use the scandal to his client’s advantage, Maurice Papon’s lawyer, Jean-Marc Varaut asked that the Black Book be introduced as evidence in the trial. The request was denied, but the message was clear. What sense did it make to prosecute Papon on charges of crimes against humanity as an accomplice to Nazism’s crimes, if Communism’s far more numerous and morally equivalent crimes, and their French apologists, went completely unpunished? Clearly, the memory of the victims of Communism in this instance was being put to dubious moral and scandalously revisionist historical uses. If exonerating Papon required convincing the court that “all cats in the night of History are grey,” then Varaut was willing to do that.

In turning to the “case studies” mentioned in the Preface that explore in more detail the ways in which memory has been misused, abused, and “corrupted,” and in which history has been challenged and
even undermined by practices associated with the “duty to” or “cult of” memory, it seems appropriate to divide these studies with reference to the forms or “vectors” of memory they represent. Accordingly, *Corruptions of Memory* is divided into three parts, “Legal Memory,” “Political Memory,” and “Cultural Memory,” in addition to a Conclusion. Part I, “Legal Memory” will be devoted to a reevaluation of the troubled legal, historical and “memorial” legacies of the trials for crimes against humanity of Klaus Barbie, Paul Touvier, and Maurice Papon. As should already be clear, these trials raised issues that have serious implications for the problems associated with the memory and history in France today. It will also examine in detail French memorial laws beginning with the Gayssot Law of 1991 that made denial of the Holocaust a crime punishable with fines and imprisonment.

Part Two, “Political Memory” will examine key instances of the “instrumentalization” of the Vichy past as it functioned in presidential elections and politics in the new century, informed the discourse of political analysis and denunciation, and in some instances provided a politico-cultural backdrop as well as impetus to political practice. In more specific terms, Part Two will consist of two chapters. The first chapter analyzes the “Le Pen Moment” when the xenophobic National Front leader Jean-Marie le Pen made it to the second round of the 2002 presidential elections. The second examines Nicholas Sarkozy’s use and misuse of the past, as well as efforts, particularly by the philosopher Alain Badiou, to delegitimize his election and politics by likening both to the practices and outlook of Pétainism.

Part Three, “Cultural Memory,” will focus primarily on the French novel since 1997, beginning with a discussion of two novels published that year, Patrick Modiano’s *Dora Bruder* and Lydie Salvayre’s *La Compagnie des spectres*. Both works creatively re-imagine “Vichy” in troublingly contemporary terms and, in Modiano’s case, recast the role of the novelist as both “seer” and historian. The discussion Part III it will then turn to two, highly problematic works of “faction” briefly described above, Jonathan Littell’s *Les bienveillantes* and Yannick Haenel’s *Jan Karski*. Through an assessment of the critical
reception of both works (and in the case of Littell’s novel, its reception in the country) it will examine the ways in which the novelists’ pretensions to writing History, or versions thereof, result in significant ways in “recycling” the memory of Vichy that are ultimately sterile and repetitive. In this sense, the novelist’s choice to write or “re-write” History turns out to be less a decisively new and boldly creative exercise in artistic freedom than a paradoxical loss of creativity in the representation of the past. Part Three will close with a discussion of a number of these issues as they apply to cinema, and to two films in particular, *Indigènes (Days of Glory)*, which appeared in 2007, and *Caché*, which appeared the year before.

*Corruptions of Memory* will conclude with intellectual and novelistic efforts to come to terms with the problematic memory of Vichy, and move beyond it. A first chapter will explore diagnoses and solutions to the problem as examined in the works of Pascal Bruckner and Tzvetan Todorov. Both philosophes have been particularly concerned with the problem over many years, as their numerous writings on the topic suggest. We will reconsider here Todorov’s notion of “exemplary memory” and its potential as a way working through the current impasse, and then explore the viability of what Bruckner calls the *devoir de nos glories*, the duty to remember past national glories as well as its crimes.

Because the novel has played a central role in creating as well shaping the current situation with regard to the memory of Vichy and its history, the current study will conclude with a discussion of two recent novels. The first, Boualem Sansal’s *Le Journal de l’Allemand, ou Le Journal des Frères Schiller* offers both a « literal » as well as an “exemplary” reading of the memory of the Holocaust as it applies to the lives of two Algerian brothers living in Paris today. In demonstrating the tragic destructiveness of literal memory, the novel also underscores the potential of “Exemplary memory” to affect positive change today. Taking a different tact, Lauren Binet re-imagines the courage and heroism of the Czechoslovakian assassins of the SS leader Reinhard Heydrich. In addition to writing the ‘history” of the event itself, Binet
shows how the “memory” of the courage and heroism of the two assassins inspires and shapes his own life in the present. For both novelists, as well as for Todorov and Bruckner, the past in the form of the memory of Vichy and all that implies cannot be and must not be an impediment to the present and future. This is true for France as a nation and as a people as well.