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Film stills from Jean-Pierre Melville's **Le Silence de la mer** (1949) reproduced for academic and artistic purposes.

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*A reinterpretation of Jean-Pierre Melville's 1949 film
The Silence of the Sea / Une réinterprétation du film
Le silence de la mer (1949) de Jean-Pierre Melville*

Chapter I

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Chapter II



Later, the **soldier**⁵ returned with another. They spoke in what they thought to be **French**⁶. I couldn't understand a word.



My niece opened the door to the stairs and went up without looking at him, as if she were **alone**⁷. He followed.

And so, he had left. And so, he submitted, like the others, like all the others of that miserable **nation**¹, and I tried to etch into my mind the **events**² of these last six months. Our evenings, his words, his **revolt**³. Yet not even he, of all men, had the courage to resist his **master's**⁴ orders.

1. The totalitarian state responsible for the outbreak of WWII and the Holocaust.
2. A global conflict between the Allies and the Axis powers, principally involving Nazi Germany, the Empire of Japan, the Kingdom of Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union and the Republic of China.
3. Resistance against Nazi propaganda.

4. Adolf Hitler (1889—1945), architect of Nazi totalitarian rule.
5. The military forces of Nazi Germany, including the Wehrmacht (army, navy, air force), the SS (Schutzstaffel, "Protection Squadron"), and other paramilitary units.
6. Language of the defeated party.
7. An expression of disapproval in response to German's military presence in French territory.



I'm not sure our reasons were very clear or very **noble**⁸. By unspoken agreement, my niece and I decided to change nothing in our lives, not the slightest detail, as if the officer didn't exist. As if he were a ghost. But it's possible that another motivation tainted my decision: Even were he my **enemy**⁹, I cannot without compunction offend a man.

*We rarely saw him in **uniform**¹⁰. First, he changed, then he knocked on our door. Was it to spare us the sight of an enemy uniform, or to make us forget and become used to him? Probably a bit of both.*

His eyes rested on my niece's face in profile, as always, stern and impassive, and when he finally looked away, I was certain I saw a kind of smiling **approval**¹¹.

One night, things suddenly changed. Tiny snowflakes fell, mixed with rain, terribly cold and damp. I was burning one of the thick logs I save for such nights. **In spite of myself**¹², I imagined the officer, covered in snow. His normal hour of arrival was long past. **With annoyance**¹³, I realised that he filled my thoughts.

8. Patriotic; exhibiting devotion and loyalty to one's nation through moral, civic, or cultural commitment.

9. A candidate of the opposing political party.

10. Standard military attire of the German armed forces, typically consisting of a feldgrau (field gray) tunic and trousers, steel helmet (Stahlhelm), boots, belt with insignia, and, depending on branch, the emblematic eagle and swastika insignia. A symbol of rank, branch, and allegiance to the Nazi regime.

11. An expression of understanding toward the French population's resistance, coupled with the confidence that such resistance is temporary and will ultimately be overcome by German authority.

12. A psychological mechanism in which the narrator projects their own circumstances onto the enemy, generating a form of sympathy contradicting to their political standing.

13. Similar to 12; a repetition of the psychological projection.

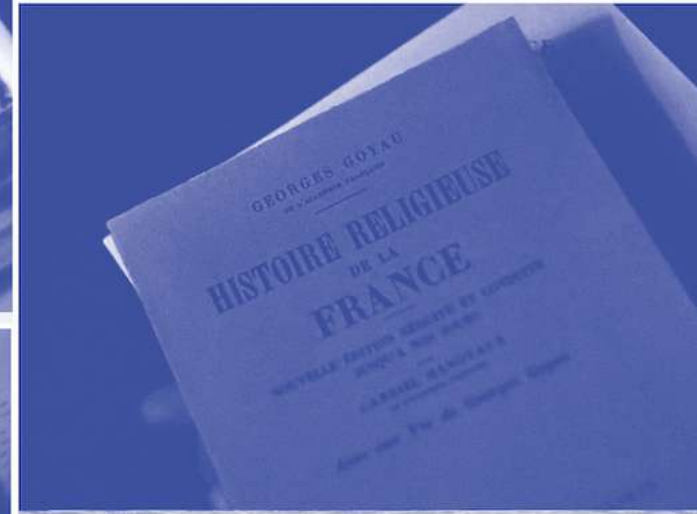
He knocked and entered without waiting for the answer he knew we wouldn't give¹⁴. With a candid casualness, he'd warm

He didn't come every night, but he never came without speaking to us. He stood by the fire, warming various parts of himself, while his voice droned on quietly about topics dear to his heart: his country¹⁵, music¹⁶, France¹⁷, in an endless monologue. Not once did he try to obtain a response from us, an agreement,

One night, entering my room to fetch some tobacco, I heard the harmonium playing. It was "Prelude and Fugue No.8¹⁸." My niece was learning it before the defeat²⁰. The songbook remained open to that page, but since then, my niece hadn't had the heart to practice.

not even a look. He never spoke long, never longer than the first night. He said a few sentences, sometimes punctuated by silence¹⁸, sometimes flowing onward with prayer-like monotony, sometimes still a statue by the fireplace, sometimes moving to examine an object or drawing, then he'd fall quiet.

himself at the fire, his excuse for visiting us. We knew it full well and so did he. He didn't even try to disguise it.



17. Once a leading nation of rapid modernisation and industrialisation in Europe. It experienced political stability and economic growth between the mid-1890s and 1914, a period later celebrated as *la Belle Époque* ("the Beautiful Era").

14. Metaphorically refers to the forced occupation of France by the Nazi regime.

15. Nazi Germany (1933–1945), officially the German Reich or Greater German Reich.

16. Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frideric Handel, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wilhelm Richard Wagner, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

18. A passive act of defiance employed by the French population under Nazi occupation, consisting of the deliberate refusal to engage in conversation or interaction with Nazi soldiers.



19. The eighth pair of preludes and fugues in the first book of The Well-Tempered Clavier by Johann Sebastian Bach.

20. The surrender of France, formalised by the Armistice of 22 June 1940 between Nazi Germany and the French Third Republic, following German's victory in the Battle of France, resulting in the establishment of a German occupation zone in northern and western France.

...he let
silence invade
the room,
filling it from
corner to corner
like a heavy,
suffocating
gas²¹...

21. An allusion to the gas chambers employed by Nazi Germany in extermination camps within occupied territories, against vulnerable civilians.



Then he'd watch my niece with that strange smile²², both approving and serious that he'd worn from the first day.

I felt the agitation of my niece's soul inside the prison²³ she'd built for it. Many signs betrayed her. The smallest, a trembling²⁴ in her fingers.

When he finally chased away the silence with his softly droning voice, it seemed that he allowed me to breathe again.

22. An expression of close conquest and domination, reflecting a sense of superiority derived from the political and military authority of the occupiers.

23. A depiction of involuntarily confinement, signifying the condition of the French population under Nazi

occupation, where acts of resistance and independent expression are suppressed and effectively "caged."

24. A physical manifestation of fear or apprehension in response to the presence of the enemy, illustrating the psychological and bodily impact of occupation.

One night, he came downstairs, holding a **book**²⁵ open with his finger, his face lit with the special half-smile of expectation when giving others a **treat**²⁶.

After she left, I felt shaken by an absurd rage, rage at being **absurd**²⁷ and having an absurd niece. What was this **foolishness**²⁸? I couldn't answer. If it was foolishness, it was deeply rooted.

My niece prepared lunch as she did everyday. She served me in silence, and we drank in silence. Outside, pale sunlight shone through the fog. It seemed very cold outside²⁹.

25. Macbeth, a Shakespearean tragedy of a Scottish general who, after three witches prophesy that he will become king, murders King Duncan with his wife's encouragement to seize the throne. Consumed by guilt, paranoia, and tyranny, he commits further murders, triggering civil war, descending into madness, and ultimately meeting his death at the hands of Macduff, thereby fulfilling the witches' prophecies and restoring order.

26. In the immediate literary context, this refers to the reading of Macbeth aloud. In the broader context of WWII, it symbolises the soldier's ideological fantasy of restoring France under German oversight, reflecting a paternalistic and propagandistic mindset.

27. A psychological mechanism whereby a patriotic citizen demonstrates care toward the enemy, producing a form of self-disguise motivated by conscience.

28. The inability to separate nationalism from personal sentiment.

29. A foreshadowing of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union (1941–1945), which became the largest and most brutal theater of World War II, resulting in approximately 5.5–7 million deaths, including the German Officer.



Chapter III

He was a great patriot¹, bitterly wounded by our defeat². And yet, he loved France. He loved Briand³. He believed in the Weimar Republic⁴ and in Briand. He was enthusiastic. He said, "He'll unite us like man and wife." He thought the sun⁵ would finally rise on Europe, but Briand was defeated and my father realised France was still led by your cruel bourgeoisie, industrialists like de Wendel⁶, Henry Bordeaux⁷, your old Marshal Foch⁸. He told me, "You must never enter France except in boots and a helmet."

...I don't regret this war⁹. I believe great things will come of it...Great things will come of this war for Germany and France. Like my father, I believe the sun will shine on Europe.



1. Refers to loyalty to the German Reich under the Hohenzollern monarchy, from the unification of Germany in 1871 until the November Revolution in 1918.
2. The defeat of Central Powers, marked by The Armistice of 11 November 1918 which terminated all fighting on land, at sea, and in the air between the Allied Powers and their last remaining opponent, Germany.
3. Aristide Pierre Henri Briand (1862 – 1932), a French politician who served as Minister of Justice and later as Prime Minister of France, leading the government from 1915 to 1917.



...But it will be the last war. We'll never fight again. We will marry¹⁰. Yes, we will. It will be the most beautiful marriage in the world.

I'm happy to have found a dignified old man... and a silent young lady. We must conquer this silence, conquer the silence of France¹¹.

4. The democratic government of Germany following the fall of the German Empire and lasting until the rise of the Nazi regime (1918 – 1933).



5. A metaphorical term for a period of cultural brilliance and economic recovery in Germany, often referred to as the "Golden Age" (1923 – 1929) of Weimar culture.
6. A family of steel-making industrialists from the Lorraine region of France, criticised for their influence over French politics and arms production.
7. A French conservative writer, lawyer, and member of the Académie française.
8. Ferdinand Foch (1851 – 1929), a French general, Marshal of France and a member of the Académie Française and Académie des Sciences. Served as Supreme Allied Commander on the Western Front during the final phase of WWI in 1918.
9. The Second World War, or World War II (1939 – 1945). A global conflict triggered by the unresolved tensions in the aftermath of WWI, the rise of fascism in Europe and militarism in Japan.
10. The legally or formally recognised union of France and Germany as one nation.
11. The passive refusal of French civilians to speak or engage with the occupying German authorities.

There's a lovely fairy tale that I read, that you've read, that everyone's read. I don't know if the title is the same. In my country it's called, **Das Tier und die Schöne**¹².

Poor **Beauty**¹³. She's at the **Beast's**¹⁴ mercy, a helpless prisoner, and he relentlessly imposes his burdensome presence. Beauty is proud, dignified. She hardens herself. But the Beast isn't as bad as he looks. Yes, he's boorish, clumsy, a brute. He seems like a boor compared to Beauty's delicacy, but he has a heart and his soul seeks elevation. If only Beauty would accept it. It takes a long time for Beauty to accept him, but slowly, gradually, she discovers in the eyes of her hated warden the glow of prayer, of love, and she forgets his heavy paws, the chains of her prison. She stops hating him. She's touched by his steadfastness and she reaches out to him. Immediately, the Beast is transformed. The curse imprisoning him in his barbarous disguise is broken. Now he is a handsome, noble knight, sensitive and cultured, and with each kiss from Beauty his qualities grow. Their union leads to sublime happiness, and their **children**¹⁵, blessed by the gifts inherited from their parents, are the most beautiful ever seen on earth.

Don't you like that story? I've always loved it. I read it over and over. It made me cry. Especially the Beast, because I understood his suffering. Even today, I am moved talking about it.



12. Beauty and the Beast, a French fairy tale written by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740.



13. German-occupied France, whose territories were under the military and administrative control of Nazi Germany.



14. Nazi Germany, which controlled the territories of France under the rule of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP).

15. A collective reference to the populations of both nations.

aréchal Goering rent LES VICTOIRES DU REICH !

Voir page 11

Berlin, 19 avril.
de l'œuvre de Be-
re de la Croix-Rouge
Führer a lancé un
ple allemand et a dé-
nent :
ous trouvons devant
e durs combats.
situer la plus grande
ple allemand pour sa
lque et vital, un évé-
grand que remarquable
otre.
cisions historiques d'une
que vont être prises.
irie allemande contem-
nouveau, avec fierté et
nance, l'œuvre de ses fils
urs des événements d'une
médérable, auront assuré,
merite héroïque de leur
sistence des générations
des à venir. »



on 3^e page, colonne 1,
de Pierre VITOUX!

LE FUHRER DÉCLARE :

*“Des décisions historiques
d'une portée unique”*

16. Adolf Hitler (1889—1945), leader of the Nazi Party from 1920/21 and chancellor and Führer of Germany (1933—45).

17. 28 May 1941.

18. Refers to the Paris Protocols, an agreement between Nazi Germany and Vichy France, granting the Germans military facilities in Syria, Tunisia, and French West Africa in exchange for reduced occupation costs

...my friends and our Führer¹⁶ have great, noble ideas, they'd also tear the legs off a mosquito, one by one. It always happens to Germans when they're lonely. It always emerges. Who is lonelier than men on the same side when they are the masters? Luckily, they're no longer alone. They're in France. France will cure them. I assure you, they know it. They know France will teach them to be great, noble men. But for this, love is needed—mutual love.

With all my heart, I await this day¹⁷ of greatest joy. I'll wait years if I must. My heart is very patient. In Paris, I'll probably see my friends. Many are involved in the negotiations with your politicians to prepare the marvelous union of our two nations¹⁸. In a way, I'll be a witness at this wedding. I rejoice for France, for now her wounds¹⁹ will heal quickly...but I rejoice even more for Germany and for myself. No one will ever benefited more from a good deed than Germany will by restoring France's greatness and freedom.

and 6,800 prisoner-of-war to France.

19. Between 1940 and 1945, Allied air forces dropped nearly 550,000 tonnes of bombs on 1,570 French cities and towns. No fewer than 68,778 men, women and children were killed and 100,000 wounded. Some 432,000 houses were destroyed; another 890,000 were damaged.

**ATTEN-
TION!
350
METERS,
PLUS 10.
FIRE!**



Do you think we're so stupid as to allow France ever to rise again? We aren't lunatics, nor are we fools. We have the opportunity to destroy France and we will do so. Not only its **might**²², but also its **spirit**²³. We will be smiling. We will proceed with mercy. But we will turn France into a cowering dog...We will pull the poison fang out of this beast.

It's a matter of life or death... The **mind**²⁴—it has been through a lot worse. The mind is immortal. We are establishing a millennial empire. And first we must destroy.

22. Refers to the full spectrum of French military capacity, encompassing both the Vichy Armistice Army (Armée de l'Armistice) and the Free French Forces (Forces Françaises Libres, FFL), as well as the broader potential of France's colonial, naval, and strategic resources.

23. The collective national ethos of France, including traditions of patriotism, civic identity, and cultural self-perception that underpinned French morale.

24. The intellectual, moral, and political resilience of the French population; their capacity to reject domination, sustain dissent, and organise spontaneous resistance against occupation.