

## LoveReading Reader reviews of The Silent Hours by Cesca Major

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

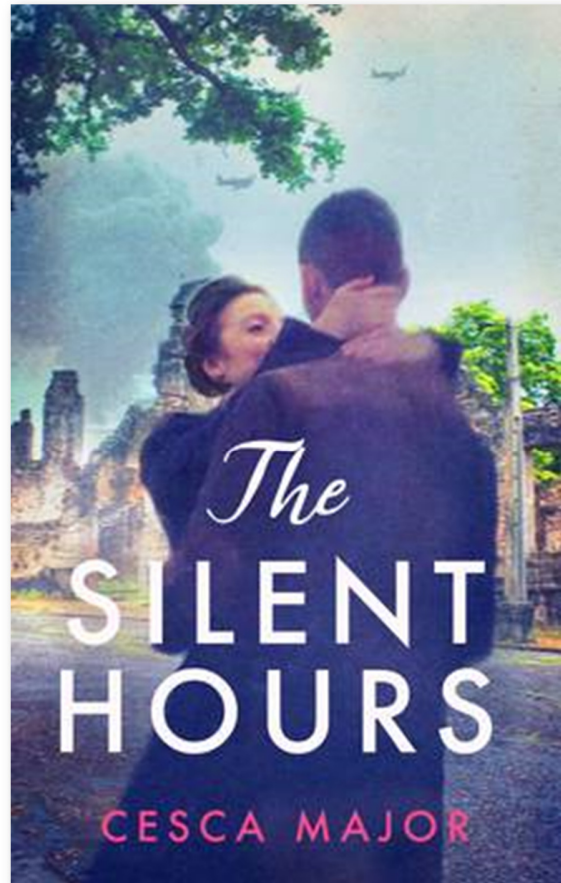
**Emily Wright**

***The emotions and events of another time and place reached out from the pages of 'The Silent Hours', pulled me in and kept me captivated from start to finish.***

*A traumatised woman haunted by vague fragments of disjointed memories; a man fighting for his country; a beautiful young teacher harbouring a secret romance; a Jewish banker; a school boy recently uprooted from Paris to a quiet village. Oradour is a peaceful haven in unoccupied France until the horrific event when war brutally invades tranquil village life.*

*The author cleverly depicts the war from different points of view to create a novel rich in light and shade, hope and despair. Each narrator has a clear and recognisable voice; from a young boy's simplistic hopes, to a soldier's emotive letters home, to the romance between two fated lovers. Cesca Major's descriptions are evocative and I was swept along by the intensity of emotions. I cried for the characters and was deeply touched by their stories, made all the more poignant by the fact the novel is based on real life events.*

*'The Silent Hours' is a thought provoking historical novel with timeless themes; I think it would be a great choice for reading groups. With a refreshing and distinctive style; Cesca Major has crafted a powerful and accomplished novel*



*that will stay with me for a long time. I look forward to reading more from her in the future; with a debut this good she is an author to watch.*

### **Edel Waugh**

*This story is based on a real horrific event that took place during war time that the author learned about, but these characters and storyline are fictional. When I finished the last page of this book I found myself with a claustrophobic sensation mixed with sorrow, dread, terror and anger, but this is no bad thing as the story was beautifully told and evokes very strong emotions.*

*The book is a mix of letters from a sister called Isabelle writing to her brother Paul who is at war, this sister is our main narrator most of the time, then in the future we see it through the eyes of a woman who is being taken care of in a nunnery in France. The story flits between the two timelines and women. This woman in the future cannot speak after experiencing something that was so horrifying that it completely alters her. She lived in the same village as Paul and Isabelle, but what she saw one day when Germans invaded their small town would change her forever. My heart broke for these characters and I found myself holding back tears and feelings that I never knew could be evoked by reading. **A powerful story, tremendously moving, and trust me when I say unforgettable.***

<http://www.edelwaugh.blogspot.com>

### **Alli Batten**

*This is a harrowing WWII novel based on a true story in Unoccupied France.*

*The book begins in 1952 with a woman called Adeline who is living in a convent but is mute because of a horrifying event that happened in her village during the war.*

*As the book unfolds, other characters are introduced. We have ten year old Tristin who has left Paris with his family for the safety of the French countryside and Sebastian a Jewish businessman who falls in love with a local girl.*

*I did initially struggle with all the characters and occasionally had to read over chapters to remind myself who certain people were, however, saying that I did love this book. **The author has clearly done her research and has written a very moving, thought provoking wartime novel** that I would*

love to see being made in to a film.

*I would have no hesitation in recommending this book to anyone who likes historical fiction.*

### **Mary Gibson**

*'The Silent Hours' by Cesca Major is a novel based on a terrible true story during World War Two in France. Told from the viewpoints of five characters, their stories eventually entwine and culminate in a tragic event. The novel starts in 1952, Adeline is a silent amnesiac, cared for by nuns in a convent in south-western France but hiding a dark secret. Flashback to 1940 and the quiet village of Oradour sur Glan near Limoges and we meet her adult children; Isabelle a schoolteacher, in love with a Jewish banker, Sebastian. Isabelle writes to her brother Paul, a French prisoner of war, captured by the Germans after the fall of France. Finally, there is Tristin, a 10 year old boy, who with his wealthy family have fled occupied France for the apparent peace and safety of rural France.*

*'The Silent Hours' is inspired by the true events of June 1944 when German soldiers massacred over 600 inhabitants of the peaceful village of Oradour. Whole families were wiped out and the village was burned. No reason was given for the massacre of innocents. It is an event that still resonates in France to this day.*

***In September 2014 I visited the museum at Oradour dedicated to the memory of those who lost their lives on that terrible day. I walked through the old village and paid my respects to those who died that sunny Saturday afternoon. The silence was palpable. No birds sang. It was the most humbling experience of my life and this compelling novel reinforced that experience.***

### **Angela Rhodes**

*Adeline has a secret, but she can't tell anyone, as much as she would like to, for Adeline is a mute, and she is waiting, she has been for a long time, ever since she turned up at the Convent just after the defeat of Germany,*

*Limoges 1940, Sebastian, a young Jewish businessman, has fallen in love with a local girl, much to the horror of his parents. Tristin is ten years old and struggling with the darkening mood of Paris. Their lives quickly become entangled, the village they live in is about to be shocked.*

***Cesca has written a beautiful novel, crafted from a true story of unoccupied France. One that will tug at the heart strings and leave the reader in disbelief at the way humans can treat each other because of their race. I loved it!***

**Evelyn Love- Gajardo**

*I have a habit of reading authors' notes before I read a book, even if they come at the end, as I like to know the context before I start reading. In the case of this novel, I wished I hadn't, as the event it describes is so horrific that all the way through the book, I dreaded the fate of the characters. It is told from various points of view, and not everyone is involved in the actual event but this is not a book to read if you want to be cheered or uplifted.*

***It is well written, with a note of hope at the end, but I found it just too painful and couldn't get it out of my head after I had finished reading it.***

**Dorothy Calderwood**

*This debut novel will appeal to anyone who enjoys reading about the events of World War II. It is based on a true story, which makes it all the more poignant, although the characters are invented.*

*There are two timelines to the novel. First, it is written in the form of letters to and from Isabelle and her brother Paul, who is away fighting for France in 1940, and from the viewpoints of a young boy named Tristin whose family has moved away from Paris to the relative safety of the countryside, and a young Jewish man named Sebastian. We also see events through the eyes of Adeline, a woman who is being looked after by nuns in a convent in France in 1952; what she experienced one day during the war when the Germans invaded her town was so horrific that it has rendered her mute. The lives of all five characters are cleverly intertwined. **The prose used throughout the novel is beautiful and the events are heart-rending.** I found the story very moving and it has stayed with me ever since I finished reading. **Cesca Major is definitely an author to watch out for.***

**Ann Peet**

***Moving, powerful novel of wartime France.***

*I'm still reeling from the ending of this powerful compulsive novel which was inspired by a shocking true story of wartime France. It starts in 1952 when Adeline, mute and traumatised, has been at a convent in France since the end of the war. There are then flashbacks to the events of the war seen through the eyes of various people - Sebastian, a young Jewish businessman, ten year old Tristin who has had to flee from Paris with his family, and Isabelle, Adeline's daughter. These alternate with chapters describing how Adeline gradually recovers her memory. While I was reading, these were the parts I enjoyed least as I felt they interrupted the flow of the story. I also felt that the tone of the first person accounts was very similar. However once the narrative starts to build to its shocking climax it becomes compelling and I defy anyone to read the last chapters without crying.*

*Definitely one of those books that will stay with me for a long time.*

### **Anne Cater**

***She has an incredible way with words and has created a love story that is memorable. She has skilfully incorporated the horrors of war and the devastating events that happened in this village.***

*'The Silent Hours' is a story that is told in threads, and each thread is expertly woven together to create an unforgettable, and quite stunning story that has such impact, and such power. It really is quite incredible that this is a debut novel, the story is haunting and beautiful and just knowing that it is based on a real story adds volumes to what really is a gripping read.*

*'The Silent Hours' is told in multiple voices and opens just after the war in the early 1950s in a nunnery in south-west France. Adeline is a mysterious woman, a mute who arrived on the doorstep of the nunnery some years ago. Nobody knows where she came from, or her story, or why she cannot, or will not speak. The reader is allowed into Adeline's thoughts, and her story slowly unfurls - with a gentle pace, and links in to the other voices of this novel.*

*The other main characters are Isabelle and her brother Paul, their stories are told in the main through the letters that they write to each other during the war years. Paul is held prisoner, Isabelle remains in their small village, and waits patiently for him to return. Sebastian is a young Jewish man, his family are successful bankers, but the war and the impact of the Nazi regime on the Jews in France alter his life dramatically. He and Isabelle meet and fall in love, and their story is the foundation of the whole novel.*

*The reader also hears from Tristan, a young schoolboy whose family have fled Paris, and now reside in the same small village. Tristan is naive, sometimes selfish and very well protected from the horrors of war. This is his coming of age story.*

<http://randomthingsthroughmyletterbox.blogspot.co.uk/>

### **Teresa O'Halloran**

***An extremely moving fictional story woven around real life events in a small French village during WWII. This will not fail to have you reaching for the tissues.***

*While not the type of book I usually read, it took me a while to really get into it but once I did it was the last thing I put down before going to sleep and the first thing I reached for during any spare moment during the day.*

*An incredibly moving fictionalized account of an actual event in a small village in France in 1944. This is an amazing story and you would have to be made of stone not to be moved by it.*

*Unbelievably this is Cesca Major's debut novel and I look forward to reading more by this talented author.*

### **Joy Bosworth**

***It starts a little like some other novels set in wartime France - but it is fascinating, gripping and very different the further one reads.***

*Initially this book reminded me of 'A Week in Paris'. The narration jumps between a large cast of people, but even so it was worth pursuing. Gradually one learns of the inter-connectedness which explains why the characters each tell their version of the story, rather than it being part of the annoying current trend.*

*Often the Nazi occupiers are drawn as exaggeratedly bad characters and their subjects as goodies, in some books. This one doesn't fall into that path at all. There is an anti-Semitic Frenchman along with a seemingly unsupportive mother, all of which adds to the authenticity of the villagers. They are real people not martyrs.*

*The descriptions are very effective, whether microscopic details of nature or*

*bone-weary tiredness of the people. The explanation near the end of the book is startlingly told in a really powerfully descriptive way.*

*If this is as a result of the author wanting a way to illustrate WWII to her students I do hope she needs to teach them more - causing other books to be written.*

### **Phylippa Smithson**

***At times haunting and engaging, and at times, disappointing given its staid pace and almost predictability. Good but not that good.***

*A nameless, mute woman is living in a convent in France. She is being cared for by a Nun who has taken great interest in her and tries to protect her from the disgruntlement of her superiors who wish to see the woman engage more actively in the life in the Nunnery, not least in attending Church.*

*As the story flashes back from the current 1950s to the pre WWII years, we learn that she is Adeline and mother of Isabel and Paul. We also get to meet others who initially live disparate and unrelated lives in Adeline's former life, but slowly (very slowly, too slowly) we see how they eventually come together.*

*I found myself really engaging with Adeline and wanting to know what occurred in her life to move her inside herself and lose the ability of speech. What I did not find convincing, was the exploring of the other lives. I found it too predictable how Major pulled these lives together at the final conclusion.*

*This could have been a great book but it did not work for me.*

### **Lynne Morgan**

*The story is based upon a truly shocking event which happened in 1944 during the Second World War to the people of Oradour-sur-Glane, a small village near Limoges in France.*

*Cesca Major weaves an intriguing story around the people who lived here and the events which led up to this terrible occurrence. As you read this book, the realisation creeps up on you gradually, and any comfortable sense of security you may feel is abruptly shattered. For the people of Oradour-sur-Glane, who believe they are safe where they are, it is totally unexpected and devastating.*

*What happens in this story is made all the more shocking to read because of Cesca's clever ability to bring each of the character's personalities alive.*

***Cesca Major's writing is very poetic, and it's a pleasure to read her words, even when the story she is telling is so distressing.***

**Val Rowe**

***An incredibly poignant, emotive and powerful novel which will feature in my top ten of favourite books ever.***

*If, like me, you have ever visited Oradour-sur-Glane in France, I urge you to read this novel. If you have not, I defy you to read this and not want to go there. This is the most amazing book I have read for a long, long time and it moved me deeply.*

*A fictional account based upon the tragic and incomprehensible events suffered at Oradour in 1944, 'The Silent Hours' is told through a few key characters who initially seem to have no link between them. As the story unfolds, their connection begins to emerge in a highly readable and vividly described way.*

*Cesca Major's skill particularly lies in her ability to enable the reader to get under the skin of each of the characters. I could feel their thoughts, feelings and pain so clearly. Her descriptive paragraphs are just perfect and at times enticing; at times, they moved me to tears.*

*I 'lived' in this book whilst reading it and this continued with me for several days after I had completed it.*

*Read it now before it is snapped up by a film producer.*

**Angela O'Donovan**

***A moving, thought provoking read. More than a love story.***

*I loved this book. I don't tend to read historical fiction or love stories but now have to admit staying up late, it was so hard to put this book down.*

*The characters were very likeable and of their time with the story driven by circumstances, with people turning to friend and neighbours with a different view but in the end there was no escaping for anyone, and in this particular story, few survivors to remember, and the paths of lives changed forever.*

*The story alternates between Adeline in 1952 and her daughter Isabelle and new boyfriend Sebastien in 1944. It is a very moving and well written story. At times, it seemed as though the story's 'mystery', as it were, was predictable. However, I was not sure until the end and the only downside was the ending for*



*me. I won't say more than that. A wonderful read. **Thank you***  
***Lovereading.co.uk.***