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Actresses Triumph in Two Top Films

LA TIMES BY KEVIN THOMAS

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Times Staff Writer

In "The Long Absence" and "Adorable Julia" Ali-da Valli and Lilli Palmer turn in a pair of tour de force performances in the biggest roles they have had in recent years.

In the first film Miss Valli plays a woman who believes she has discovered in an amnesic tramp her long-lost husband; in the other picture Miss Palmer is a glamorous actress, the darling of the London stage, who falls in love with a much younger man. Notable for their finely-wrought dialogue and exceptional acting, these films are at the Los Feliz and Esquire-Pasadena theaters.

The proprietress of a workingman's bar in the village of Puteaux on the banks of the Seine, Miss Valli slowly comes to believe that the tramp who passes her door at sunrise and sunset is her husband, deported to Germany during the war and reported dead. When she hears him hum the Figaro aria from "The Barber of Seville" she is certain of his identity, since her husband was an opera buff.

Long Process

From here on she begins the agonizing process of getting this man to remember her. Ever so patiently she follows him on his daily rounds of rag-picking, gaining his friendship. Closing her cafe, she plies him with her husband's favorite foods, loads her jukebox with opera records and even brings in his relatives in the hope of confirming her belief in his true identity.

But they are not as certain as she, and it is in this uncertainty—Is this man in fact Miss Valli's hus-

band? Will she be able to restore his memory?—that gives this unusual film its double-edged suspense.

A grand prize winner at Cannes, "The Long Absence" was written by Marguerite Duras, who wrote "Hiroshima Mon Amour" and "Moderato Cantabile," and marks the impressive directorial debut of Henri Colpi, who edited "Hiroshima Mon Amour" and Resnais' documentary on the Nazi concentration camps, "Night and Fog."

Along with Georges Wilson, who, as the gentle, puzzled victim of amnesia, is every bit as superb as Miss Valli, these gifted people have created an emotionally engaging picture out of a situation that easily could have slipped to the level of women's magazine fiction.

Some Suspense

There is also an element of suspense in "Adorable Julia," a conventional drawing room comedy lifted out of the ordinary by an array of scintillating performances. Just what the motivations of Jean Sorel are in his pursuit of Miss Palmer is the question here. Is he truly infatuated with this older woman? Or is he merely using her—and for what purpose?

Although the answers to these questions come too early in the picture, which was adapted from Somerset Maugham's "Theatre," the savoir-faire, the civilized elegance of Miss Palmer, Charles Boyer (her husband) and the handsome Sorel make it worth watching to the last frame. No screen stylist, Alfred Weidenmann is nevertheless skillful in getting beautifully-modulated performances from his cast.