

Document Citation

Title	L'armee des ombres
Author(s)	Gene Moskowitz
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1969 Sep 24
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	L'armee des ombres (Army of shadows), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1969

variety 9/24/69
L'Armée Des Ombres
 (The Shadow Army)
 (FRENCH-COLOR)

Paris, Sept. 23.

Valoria Films release of Corona Films-Fono Roma production. Stars Simone Signoret, Lino Ventura, Jean-Pierre Cassel, Paul Meurisse; features Claude Mann, Paul Crauchet, Serge Reggiani, Christian Barbier. Written and directed by Jean-Pierre Melville from book by Joseph Kessel. Camera (Eastmancolor) Pierre Lhomme; art director, Theobald Meurisse. No other credits. Reviewed at George V. Paris, Sept. 11, '69. Running time: 140 MINS.

Gerbier Lino Ventura
 Luc Paul Meurisse
 Mathilde Simone Signoret
 Francois Jean-Pierre Cassel
 Barber Serge Reggiani
 Le Masque Claude Mann
 Le Bison Christian Barbier
 Victim Alain Libolt

The French Resistance Movement during the last war usually gets heroic film treatment or is used for ironic comments on human nature or black comedy. It has also been the background for personalized tales of human hope, endeavor and courage laced with providence. Now Jean - Pierre Melville gives a painstaking reconstruction of the period and brings off a sober, well-observed tale of the early workings of the French Resistance.

Action is often eschewed and only indulged in when necessary. Torture is also avoided so as not to try for effects. Rather, the victims are shown with pulpy faces after being worked over. Result is a slow but generally absorbing meditation on the resistance and its need for courage and even nobility, a rare item in these days of more explicit themes and delvings into human actions.

Film does get a bit grandiloquent but still manages to avoid melodrama. Even a ripe coincidence makes itself acceptable by the measured treatment and generally fine feel for the times and an apparent rightness in depicting the early workings of the small resistance groups who only got bigger following, seemingly, near the end of the war.

Lino Ventura is first picked up in prison where his stolid but shrewd and generous character is amply revealed. He manages to escape and then pic veers into the workings of the outfit in collaboration with the British. Ventura gives intermittent commentary that fills in the disparate scenes and actions. Not much is given about their resistance activities except for helping downed Allied flyers.

The leader seems to be a retired esthete and his own brother is not aware of his work. The brother sacrifices himself to try to save an imprisoned friend and they are decimated one by one. Simone Signoret adds an arresting portrait of a woman resistant who is captured and then released when she apparently names some names to save her daughter from being shipped to a German bordello in Poland.

She is killed by her own people when they decide she did it to gain time and save her daughter. But this is left ambiguous. Film is too long and could be sheared and tightened for greater impact. Its theme and solidity in treatment could give this some specialized legs abroad though its insistence on the ordinary, everyday aspects of the affair sometimes make this indulgent.

Melville is another maverick director who goes his own way and makes pix when he feels like it. For a time he made them at his own studio but now is a part of the industry, albeit still aloof and making pix on his own terms. He is a fine craftsman and seemingly more concerned with how his characters do things than why, which makes the attempts to delve into the philosophy of resistance somewhat ostentatious but solid and workable when it shows them in action or at work.

Having to kill one of their own men does make a point about the horrors of any violence but it is somewhat gratuitous in the context of the attitude of the nobility and generally self-effacing outlooks and sacrifices of the heroes. Besides Ventura and Miss Signoret, Jean - Pierre Cassel, Paul Crauchet and others are effective in helping this long, careful, well-intentioned tale of resistance from lagging. If it does ennoble its heroes, it refrains from sanctifying them and has it a tale of human sacrifice that is rarely ostentatious.

Color is subdued, in keeping with the theme and times, with fine editing. Melville is brilliant, but torn between feelings of

human comradeship, duty and nobility to keep the film from being more than a fine surface look at a certain period sans the fillip of deeper human insight to make it a more general and humanized tale of man in conflict and his needs for sacrifice to an end.

General de Gaulle shows up in a quick shot when two of the

leaders are in Britain for contacts. The British section has more ambience and gives a truer feeling of people coping with war that is not always present in the main French seg where sometimes motives and actions are explained at length in talk rather than allowing the images to speak for themselves. But it is a commendable if uneven try with foreign placement calling for care and selectivity. Mark.