

Trial By Jury

JUSTICE EST FAITE

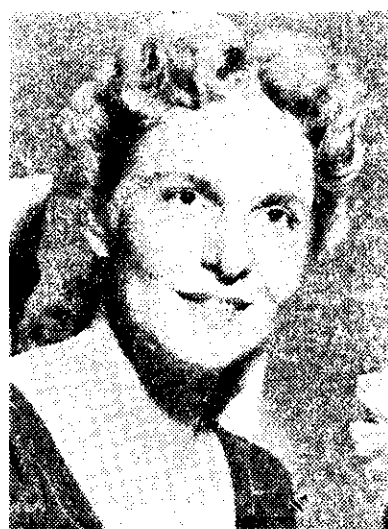
(Silver Films-Archway)

HOW would you have cast your vote, I wonder, if you'd been a member of the jury when Elsa Lundenstein went on trial for her life? She'd killed her lover—she admitted that. He was dying of cancer when she gave him the fatal dose of morphine, to end his suffering, she said. But there was other evidence, which she confirmed—a legacy, another man—which, to the prosecution, and to some of the jury, suggested other motives. Seven ordinary men and women had to judge her. Though they happened to be Frenchmen, they might as easily have been any seven of us. How well then, would we have done our duty as the instruments of justice, and how high would the quality of our motives have been? These are the sort of questions you'll ask yourself as you

walk to the tram after seeing *Justice est Faite*.

This film, you see, tells the story not only of the trial of Elsa Lundenstein, but of the seven who tried her. It's a very straightforward piece of work: there are no flashbacks or technical tricks. The jury is called, the trial begins; incidentally, it gives an interesting picture of French judicial procedure, which came in for some criticism in Britain after the recent Dominici affair. Between the dramatic courtroom scenes the camera looks into the lives of the jurymen—a suitor winning over his girl friend's parents, an old soldier dealing with his flighty daughters, a printer deciding the fate of a mentally unstable son, a woman taking a young lover, and so on. They all have problems of greater and less importance involving other people. Their lives influence and are influenced by their judicial task, they talk or hold their tongues, are charitable or not, and for a variety of reasons make their individual judgments. Right at the end tragedy looks into the life of one of them, and in a brief scene heavy with significance he knows, too late, that a moment's suffering can transform complicity into a deep understanding.

Justice est Faite is distinguished by good direction (by Andre Cayatte) and some wonderful acting. Claude Nollier and Michel Auclair do an excellent job as Elsa and the "other man," and among



GERALDINE PAGE
A woman of principle

the jurymen Noël Roquevert as the old soldier and Raymond Bussieres as the suitor are unforgettable. For these reasons this film would be worth going out of the way to see if it were no more than a courtroom drama, and those who go to the movies only to be entertained should still be pretty satisfied on that level. Clearly, however, it attempts to go beyond entertainment—to examining trial by jury in dramatic form and

to look below the surface into the hearts and minds of a fairly typical group of people chosen at random to judge a fellow human.

This point is made explicit in a brief spoken epilogue. Now, that's a device I don't much like, yet it seems to me no more objectionable in a film of this sort than, say, Chaplin's last speech in *Monsieur Verdoux*, or the printed epilogue to a Shaw play; for if a popular art like the cinema is really to make us more aware (and, therefore, one hopes, more civilised), I think it must occasionally underline to reach the widest audience. *Justice est Faite* underlines because it says something which everyone should hear—for after all, trial by jury isn't just a French institution. If you think, you might feel, as I did, after seeing this film that there's something to be said for satisfying our curiosity about the misfortunes of others in works of the imagination rather than in the columns of the tabloids.

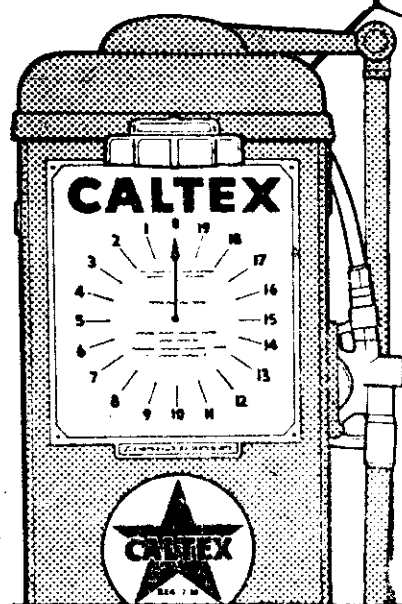
HONDO

(Wayne-Fellows-Warner Bros.)

WHEN a lanky stranger walks out of the wasteland up to a farmhouse complete with a small boy and an agreeable looking woman, all set in the middle of a wide screen and filmed in colour—as *Hondo* begins, in other words, you just might get the feeling that you've been here, or hereabouts, before.

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