

Swedish Lady Chatterley

MISS JULIE

(International Films)

THE full resources of the cinema are seldom adequately exploited in a single film, yet when they are, in such a production as this adaptation of August Strindberg's play, the barriers of language seem to be almost completely broken down. *Miss Julie* is a Swedish film, but its sub-titles are hardly necessary because the story is told in the language of the eye. The photography (by a coincidence in the hands of the playwright's grandson, Goran Strindberg) is superlatively good, and the director, Alf Sjöberg, has made full use of visual symbolism to emphasise the moral of his story.

The opening scene shows Miss Julie (Anita Björk), the daughter of a Swedish noble family, living on their country estate, looking down from her window at the midsummer night celebrations of farm workers and their girls as they dance around a maypole in the fields. A caged canary hangs in the window by her head. She goes to the dance when it continues in a hay-filled barn, and waltzes with her father's coachman, Jean (played by Alf Palme). Julie appears as a high-spirited, spoilt girl who has just sent away her fiancé in a fit of pique, and who now flirts with her father's servant instead. But Jean, a man of aspiring vision coarsened by his life as a menial, reveals that he has secretly loved her since he was a boy. They wander through the moonlit fields among the revelling peasants, and he rows her on the river when his drunken companions pursue them.

When they hide in his room he seduces her because the story of his childhood infatuation has weakened her resistance, while the dancers sing and drink boisterously in the kitchen on the other side of the door. In the morning they are both distracted. For a moment she has thought she loves him, but now that he has triumphed he alternately abuses her and urges her to run away with him to start a hotel in Switzerland. She goes back to the house and there tells him the story of her own unhappy childhood, but at the instant when they are ready to leave the estate together her father, the count, returns with her fiancé. She cannot face a continuance of her old life and commits suicide.

These incidents are presented with an adroit use of interlocking flashbacks to show the past lives of the two main characters, played out against the continual background of midsummer debauchery which underlines the sexual passion which is the motif of the drama. The eccentric life of the count and his half-crazy mistress is revealed in the film's longest flashback, and although there is a little too much melodrama here, the episode is neatly dovetailed into the few hours of the action of the main story. Jean's role as a romantic lover is pointed out early in the film when he is seen driving the count's pony trap through the park, and shots of his own face are juxtaposed with those of the marble features of classical sculptures which are dotted along the driveway. The film achieves an effect of great cohesion and solidity, and the potentialities of camera, sound-track and exterior setting are triumphantly mastered.

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 15, 1953.

BAROMETER

FINE: "Miss Julie."
FINE: "High Noon."

HIGH NOON

(Stanley Kramer-RKO Radio)

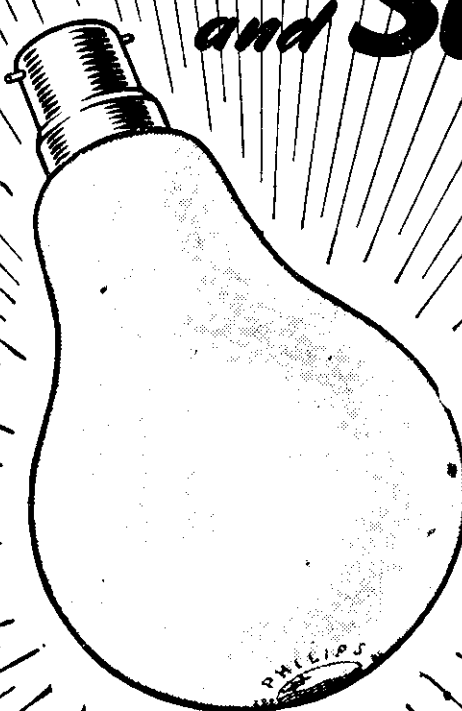
AT half-past ten on Sunday morning three desperadoes rode through the single street of Hadleyville, a Western cow town. The citizens taking their wives to church and the loafers around the saloon knew it meant only one thing—Frank Miller was out of gaol and was coming back to get his revenge on the man who had put him there. The three gunnies stopped at the station, a shed beside a pair of railway lines stretching across the plains beneath the sun. Perspiration dripped down their faces as they enquired if the noon train (Frank Miller on board) was on time. In the marshal's office Kane, the retiring marshal, hung up his gun and his silver star and kissed the woman he had just married.

These scenes mark the opening of one of the best Westerns that Hollywood has made, in which Gary Cooper, as the ageing, tired personification of frontier justice, decides to take up his gun again to fight one last battle with the forces of disorder, at the almost impossible odds of four to one. As the plot develops it becomes clear that this is no ordinary gun fight. When Kane goes to the church to ask for volunteers for a posse, no one will help him; the citizens would rather have Frank Miller and his three henchmen running the town than gunplay in the streets, and the certain death of some of them. They urge the marshal to leave town, but his inexorable sense of duty refuses to let him walk out on his suicidal responsibility as preserver of the law.

As noon approaches he finds himself deserted by his friends and even at last by his wife, and as the sun beats down on the deserted street he sits down in his office to write out his last will and testament. When the shooting starts he fights it out alone, and by a miracle (and his wife's last minute assistance) kills his enemies, after which he drops his badge of office in the dust and rides out of the town whose spirit has failed it at the moment of crisis. The film ends as a triumph for an upright, lonely man but a bitter defeat for mankind in general, which has failed to live up to the ideals it has entrusted to its stern protector.

High Noon has been presented with scrupulous realism and the laconic simplicity of a folk tale, and Stanley Kramer and his director, Fred Zinnemann, have concentrated into its few hours of action about as much suspense as the film-maker's art can contrive. The heat and the passing of time are emphasised by cunningly angled camera-work, by shots of the baking earth or the sweat-lined faces of the protagonists, by the swinging pendulum of a clock on the marshal's wall. The rich assortment of supporting parts are all excellently sketched in, and include Ian MacDonald as the returning killer, Grace Kelly as the marshal's bride, Lloyd Bridges as a craven deputy-marshal, and Katy Jurado as the spirited Mexican woman who was once the marshal's lover.

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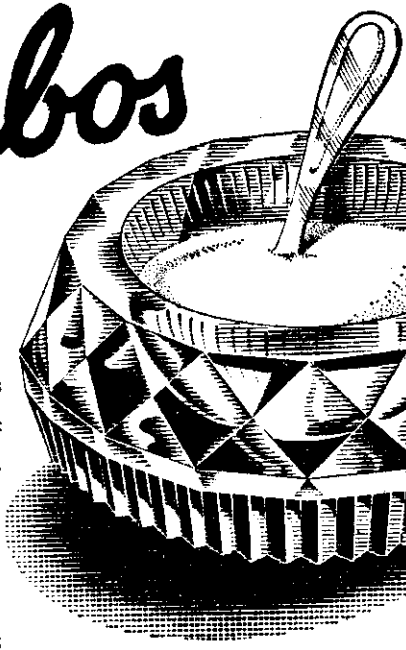
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