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Author(s)	Peter Cowie
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Works of social criticism are rare in the Swedish cinema. Few of the great directors have been more concerned with the contemporary problems of society than with their own private worlds. *They Staked their Lives* is a film directed towards pacifism, as one has noted, and *The Judge* (Domaren, 1960) is Sjöberg's other attack on conventions in society. A young poet, Krister Langton, returns home after a trip to Italy and finds that his former guardian, a judge called Edvard Cuning, has ruined him financially. His house has been stripped of its belongings. The police, despite the pleas of Langton's fiancée Brita Randel, are powerless. A judge in Sweden is virtually inviolable. One ineffectual lawyer after another refuses to help the author in his predicament. Langton becomes hysterical with anger. Soon the judge persuades a psychiatrist to have him "confined" on the grounds of mental instability. But Brita has met a keen young lawyer Albert Arnold, who is intrigued and infuriated by Langton's position, and he harangues the judge through the press. A trap is laid, and the judge unwittingly allows his comments on the situation to be recorded on tape. Eventually, in a stormy court scene that hinges on the principle of the freedom of speech, justice is peculiarly attained.

Sjöberg directs *The Judge* at lightning speed. This leads to the melodramatics that undermine *Wild Birds*, and to a curious mixture of moods. At one moment the film is frightening, almost tragic (Langton huddled hopelessly in the misty gardens of the asylum), and at the next there is frivolity and persiflage (the antics in the newspaper offices, for example). The concluding sequence in a crowded courtroom should be as threatening as the courtroom scene in Welles's *The Trial*. But when Mrs. Wangendorff produces the incriminating tape, the cheering of the local press is too parochial, too theatrical, and, in the context of the film itself, altogether incredible. The only penetrating moments in this vein are in the ombudsman's office, where Sjöberg digs humorously at the pedantry of legal-minded people. One is far more awed by Sjöberg's control of settings and of his characters' movements within them; by the heavy interiors of Langton's house, with pictures glaring down on one; by the shabby bedsitter where the boy and his fiancée are obliged to live, with the trains rumbling by continually; and by the wide staircases of the court. Sjöberg seems too obsessed with the urgency of his subject (based, incidentally, on an actual case of embezzlement in Sweden not so long ago) to avoid distressing clichés such as the overwhelming music that accompanies the kiss between Brita and Albert Arnold, and the singing of the "Marseillaise" to symbolise freedom from injustice. Even the judge himself, as he appears at the end, is effete and elderly, quite at odds with the actions that he is supposed to have instigated.