

Willy Was a Salesman

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

(Stanley Kramer-Columbia)

THE last 24 hours of Willy Loman's life are an emotional ordeal, even if you take them straight from the printed pages of Arthur Miller's prize-winning play. Brought to life by Fredric March in the film translation of *Death of a Salesman* their intensity may exhaust and haunt you. That's how they affected me, though I already knew the play well and had seen it on the amateur stage.

Be well liked and you'll be a big shot, is Willy's philosophy; and it's on such ripe wisdom that this commercial traveller has brought up his two sons in a little house in Brooklyn, New York—a house that once had a garden but is now so well built in that you have to break your neck to see a star. Unfortunately this philosophy hasn't served any of them very well. For Happy (Cameron Mitchell), the dream of being a well-liked big shot is mixed up with having his "own apartment, a car, and plenty of women," and he already is half aware of the caterpillar under the leaf; and Biff (Kevin McCarthy) is still looking for himself

BAROMETER

FINE: "Death of a Salesman."
FAIR TO FINE: "The Little World of Don Camillo."

after 20 or 30 jobs. No longer of any account as a salesman, Willy himself is realising at 60 that, well-insured, he is worth more dead than alive, while his wife, Linda (Mildred Dunnock), can do little for the man she loves but stand and wait.

Willy's mind is full of strange thoughts of the past, and his world as the play and the film sees it is partly the real world about him (which much of the time reminds him so much of failure that it's more than he can bear), and partly an idealised remembered world. The film takes us into this world not by dissolving into conventional flashback but by wheeling the camera on to another part of the set and, as it were, by-passing the present. In this way Willy's dream world becomes so much part of the present that at first it might puzzle some who are not prepared for it. I thought myself it was a pretty successful experiment, in which only the visits of Uncle Ben were a little unreal; but then as a symbol of the sort of get-rich-quick pioneer he

isn't meant to be as real a memory as the other incidents of the past, as his later appearances make clear.

The acting throughout is of a very high order indeed. Fredric March's deeply-felt Willy is hardly surprising, but the two great moments of the film are given us by people most of us know little about. Mildred Dunnock's interpretation of Linda's speech to her sons, with the recurring line "Attention must be paid to such a person," is indescribably moving—it really must be heard to be believed. The film is almost as much the story of Biff's crisis in his search for himself as of Willy's surrender, and Kevin McCarthy (who played the part on the London stage) lets nothing of this crisis escape him. His breakdown when, sobbing on Willy's shoulder, he tells the truth about himself and their phony dream, is the film's second great moment. These players are well supported by the rest of the cast, notably by Howard Smith as an easy-going neighbour whose speech before the final fade-out neatly drives home the point of the play.

So far as I could make out *Death of a Salesman* was being sold in Wellington largely on the strength of the young Biff's discovery that Willy had been unfaithful to Linda. This incident was important only in the context of the story; for what the play is really concerned with, of course, are the values that throughout their lives have been letting the Lomans down—values that are common not only to salesmanship

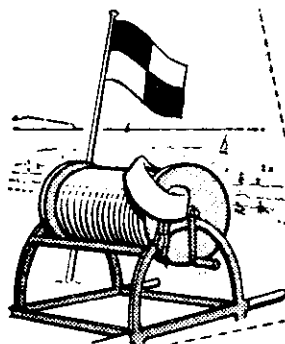
and the American way of life at its worst, but in a measure to all who worship "the Bitch Goddess, Success." Stanley Roberts's adaptation of the play and Laslo Benedek's intelligent and imaginative direction treat this theme with the respect it deserves.

THE LITTLE WORLD OF DON CAMILLO

(Rizzoli-Amato-London Films)

I HAVEN'T read *The Little World of Don Camillo*, and can only judge Julien Duvivier's film as if it were an original creation. It is in many ways so well made, directed and edited so as to produce such beautiful fluidity and effective contrasts, that I hate to say a word in criticism; but it is also so much like two different films—superimposed, as it were, on one another—that I must. One film tells an episodic story of life in a small Continental town, whose atmosphere M. Duvivier showed in *Panique* he could capture so well. The episodes are the sort one finds in films like *Jour de Fete*—in fact, the stooped old lady in *Don Camillo* who had been a schoolteacher and dies an unrepentant monarchist, suggests one of the characters from the Tati film. In the same class is a christening, lovers meeting through a wall that divides the rich land from the poor, and—best of all—a village football match.

In and out between these episodes weaves the story of Don Camillo the



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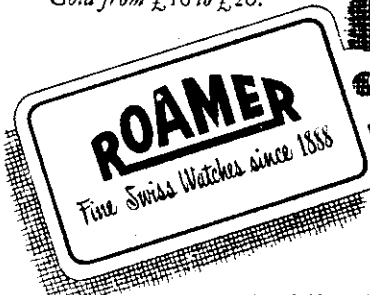
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