

Salvador Dali Interprets "Macbeth"

MACBETH. Edited by George Lyman Kittredge. Illustrated by Salvador Dali. 125 pp. New York: Doubleday & Co. \$3.

By WOLCOTT GIBBS

JUST why it should have been thought necessary to apply the decorative talents of Salvador Dali to "Macbeth" is something of a mystery in spite of the bloody, supernatural and gener-



ally complementary nature of the text. However, an enterprising publisher has decided to do so, and all we can do is to investigate the result, in so far as possible with an open mind.

Mr. Dali, then, has designed twelve plates, all very handsomely drawn, and all excessively strange. They illustrate what Shakespeare had in mind somewhat to the same extent that a similar series by James Thurber may have been said to illuminate the meaning of various familiar poems, including "Alice, Ben Bolt," "Excelsior" and "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight"—which is to say that they seem disturbingly to have something to do with the poet's ideas, but that on closer investigation they also contain suggestions of another and rather darker story.

THE first of Mr. Dali's compositions takes place opposite Page 12 and deals presumably with the witches on the blasted heath. These ladies, however, while undeniably plain, are equipped with curves that might easily make them the amazement and envy of Hollywood, and there are certain very explicit details in the background that can have been only very remotely inspired by eyes of newts or toes of frogs. Nevertheless, such license may easily be permissible in a free interpretation of Shakespeare (there have been far more striking eccentricities on the stage), and we will concede it, though uneasily. The drawing opposite Page 29 (arrival of Duncan) is, as far as I can see, a pure example of spirit writing. There appear to be some scratches on a slate—some figures, possibly, groping helplessly through a thick fog—and since they can convey little to the mortal mind, we will pass them over, too.

The plate opposite Page 32, however, is something else. Here, I should say, we have a represen-

tation of the drunken chamberlains, though this may merely be a product of my own peculiar imagination. Anyway, there seem to be three of them, though visibly they share but two heads, and one is employing a crutch, rather oddly, to support his hand, while another has fallen partly forward into a lighted candle, perilously balanced on a drum of gasoline. For some reason, my daughter, who is 6, considers this the most hilarious drawing she has ever seen—and in a way I can see what she means.

OPPOSITE Page 42 ("Infirm of purpose. Give me the daggers!") there is a vehemently crosseyed girl, whose head is also rather unpleasantly split right down the middle, whom I take to be Lady Macbeth at the very height of her homicidal mania. She is odd, but on the whole reasonably clear, as are Duncan's horses ("beauteous and swift, the minions of their race"), which appear, with their legs broken in several places, opposite Page 52. There is also a picture, facing Page 72 and reminding me somehow of an illustration for "Monsieur Beaucaire," which shows a handsome couple about to seat themselves in a glittering chair. This obviously has something to do with Banquo's ghost

appearing at the feast, and I had no particular trouble with that one, either.

Opposite Page 82, however, we have Dali at his most characteristic and strange. In various parts of this picture, again concerned with the witches (I guess), there appears a box from whose keyhole blood gushes into a bowl also containing a dismembered human finger; a skeleton wearing a robe with a grinning, rubbery mouth in the middle; a woman, part octopus, from whose head sprout various kitchen utensils; the conventional bureau drawer emerging from a human thorax, and a pair of hands bearing forceps, with which they are apparently trying to pull a goat out backward through something very unpleasant indeed. A good many specimens follow this master work—an otherwise beautiful lady with no head; a gentleman who has been as neatly eviscerated as any fish; a hand pierced with what looks like a sword cane—but they are anticlimatic. The great picture is one of the season's most provocative works of art, and in a sense it establishes the tone of the book, though what *that* is I would scarcely care to say.

The text, by the way, is absolutely rational, even to the point of containing punctuation.



Drawings by Salvador Dali for "Macbeth."