Salvador Dali Interprets “Macbeth”


By WOLCOTT GIBBS

JUST why it should have been thought necessary to apply the decorative talents of Salvador Dalí to “Macbeth” is something of a mystery in spite of the bloody, supernatural and gener-
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 crossed-eyed 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 somewhat of an illustration for “Monseur Beaucaire,” which shows a handsome couple about to seal 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 Dalí at his most character-atic 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 for-ceps, 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 antclimactic. 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 Dalí for “Macbeth.”