

CALEDONIA STERN AND WILD

MACBETH

(Mercury-Republic)

IF (like Ronald Frankau) you like to see a murder when you're out, then *Macbeth*—as adapted, amended, abbreviated, acted, and directed by Orson Welles—is, in a word, your meat. Mr. Welles, like any other director faced with the problem of fitting the play into the framework of a standardized film, has had to jettison a critical amount of Shakespeare, but all the familiar on-stage manslaughter has been preserved and for good measure we get the execution of the ci-devant Thane of Cawdor (whose title fell to Macbeth) and the suicide leap of Lady Macbeth forby!

We also meet for the first time a Holy Father, a character whose function is somewhat obscure (he appears to be intended as a counterpoise to the subversive elements on the Blasted Heath), but who proves a useful stand-in for odd Messengers and Old Men purged from the original *dramatis personae*. But if the action of the drama springs, in the words of the prologue, from Agents of Chaos plotting against Christian law and order, Mr. Welles

doesn't let you forget that the Scotland of those days was bleak, savage and primitive—socially and meteorologically. The blanket of the dark is hardly lifted throughout the performance, and how old Duncan could describe the dank basalt catacomb of Macbeth's castle as having a pleasant seat passes comprehension. The only comfortable corner I noticed was the bearskin-trimmed day-couch on which Lady Macbeth (Jeanette Nolan) was first discovered. (She was busy invoking the Spirits that Attend on Mortal Thought to unsex her there and then, but it was obvious that it would be a tough assignment for any spirit.)

This accentuation of the primitive, and the outlandish, was carried to such lengths that in the end it degenerated into the ludicrous and robbed the play of dignity. Macbeth's uncomfortably square crown could have been accepted (though it suggested a comic footnote to one hackneyed Shakespearean tag) but his tartan snoods, his Tartan helmet (a sort of fur-trimmed tea-cosy), and another confection that made him look like the Statue of Liberty, seemed too fantastic to consider seriously.

Mr. Welles, of course, took them and everything else very seriously indeed

★
MACBETH & FRIENDS
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown
★



and his seriousness was, I think, his undoing. As well as enormous energy he has a streak of genius; but genius is often a solemn quality and a sense of proportion does not always thrive in company with it. The Welles *Macbeth*, in consequence, has some good moments and some bad ones—and occasionally they coincide. His pictorial sense is good, and the film is always, at the very least, interesting to look at. Some sequences, however, would have been more moving but for the hilarity carried over from an earlier incongruity, or the

simultaneous intrusion of ersatz Scots accents.

Beyond manipulation of the text—I should say that about half of the original dialogue was dispensed with—and the cast, there did not seem to me to be anything particularly revolutionary in the interpretation. Neither Welles nor Miss Nolan (whose acting experience has, I believe, been hitherto confined to radio plays) broke fresh ground, and I was interested to observe that the form of the soliloquy was carried over without any serious modification. The only



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