

Shakespeare intended the apparitions to appear the work of Hecate, and only possible by her direct intervention and action.

"Upon the corner of the moon  
There hangs a vaporous drop profound ;  
I'll catch it 'ere it comes to ground :  
And that, distilled by magic sleights,  
Shall raise such artificial sprites,  
As by the strength of their illusion  
Shall draw him on to his confusion."

The witches were mere instruments in Hecate's hands to accomplish Macbeth's doom. Each apparition foreshadows Macbeth's fate—had not his eyes been blinded. The armed head, Macduff as a warrior; the bloody child, Macduff "not of woman born;" the child crowned with a tree in his hand, Malcolm as king and progenitor of kings—not satisfied with these presentments, Macbeth asks more, and the eight kings appear.

"Horrible sight ! Now, I see 'tis true ;  
For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me,  
And points at them for his."

This last apparition was devised by Shakespeare to please James I. :—

"The eighth appears, who bears a glass  
Which shews me many more ; and some I see  
That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry."

This is an obvious allusion to the union of the kingdoms of England and Scotland, and to the shadowy claim then still made by English kings to the throne of France. And then the witches finally vanish, with their parting gibe ringing in the tortured ears of their victim:

"Perform your antique round ;  
That this great king may kindly say,  
Our duties did his welcome pay."

Apart from the witches, there is only one horrible supernatural occurrence in Macbeth—the appearance of Banquo's ghost at the feast—and that, in spite of the stage directions, may better be taken as :—

"The very pointing of your fear ;  
This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,  
Led you to Duncan. \* \* \* when all's done,  
You look but on a stool."

In conclusion, I can but repeat that in "Macbeth" the Supernatural is the Play. No tragedy of Shakespeare's is more perfect in form and workmanship; none has more exquisite passages, more melodious verse, more thrilling imagery, more awful grandeur, and none other deals so directly with the struggle of a human soul. Shakespeare wrote a play—not an allegory—but neither the sacred, rugged prose of Bunyan, nor the majestic verse of Milton, has bequeathed to the world a more awful allegory than the tragedy of Macbeth. The temptation; the yielding, and its inevitable consequence; the attempt to hide one crime by heaping on it others; the ruin of the soul; the misery of the body; the sad, despairing words :—

"My way of life  
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf ;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have ; but in their stead  
Curses not loud but deep."

—these all shew how Shakespeare, although he so rarely mentions the devil, deals inexorably with a man who trafficked with the devil and did the devil's work.

