MACBETH AS A CASE OF CONSCIENCE

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De Quincey in his essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in 'Macbeth'" says very illuminatingly that a sense of reaction usually comes after the intense moment of a dramatic event so that the action "is best expounded, measured, and made apprehensible, by reaction." And this, he says, is happening in the knocking scene of Macbeth, for the knocking is in fact the annunciation of "the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live" and by this we are made "profundely sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them." Before the knocking we have been with Macbeth in the fiendish world of murder, and being, as it were, awakened by the knocking, we come out of that murderer's world into the usual world in which ordinary people live. We are returning to the world of time from the world where "time [is] annihilated." It seems, however, that De Quincey has overlooked another important aspect of the knocking—where in reality "a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity" of the knocking comes from.

Apart from the knocking we have many other auditory images in this scene such as "the owl that shrieked," "the fatal bell-man," "snores," the cries of "God bless us!" and "Amen," the imaginary voices Macbeth hears crying "Sleep no more!..." and so on. These of course are pregnant with situational suggestions and symbolic meanings: e.g., ominous associations and the unusually intense stillness of the situation are suggested and the symbolic death of Sleep is implied.


[ 13 ]
An important thing is that in the ominous stillness, in the seeming
death of the world, Lady Macbeth is self-possessed enough to recognize
the owl’s scream and crickets’ cry, while Macbeth hears an imaginary
voice which is unheard by his wife. On his way back from the murder,
he, fancying a voice is heard when there is actually none, cries, “Who’s
there?—what, ho!” A voice crying “Sleep no more” to all the house
is also imaginary and so may perhaps be the sleepers’ cries of “God
bless us!” and “Amen.” Macbeth’s consciousness is certainly turned
inward; he is breathing not in the actual world but in his private inner
world. When he hears the knocking he cannot tell where it comes
from. He asks himself, “Whence is that knocking?” In fact he is
wondering fearfully if it comes from within himself. Every sound
appals him, but especially this knocking. Why?

Sir Thomas More in his *The Four Last Things* says,

... as St Paul saith, the fleshly sins be eth [=easy] to perceive, and so
should they have occasion to call for grace and wax good, where now by
their pride, taking themselves for good where they be naught, they be far
from all occasion of amendment, saving the knocking of our Lord, which
always standeth at the door of man’s heart and knocketh, whom I pray
God we may give ear unto and let Him in.¹

Here that which always stands at the door of man’s heart and knocks
is the voice of conscience, the voice of God. King James, in his
*Basilicon Doron*, comments to the same intent:

Conscience ... is nothing else, but the light of knowledge that God hath
planted in man, whiche euver watching over all his actions, as it beareth
him a joyfull testimonie when he does right, so choppeth [=knocks] it
him with a feeling that he has done wrong, when cuer he committeth any
sinne.²

The point is that in the knocking scene, where our attention is entirely
thrown on the murderer, the knocking we hear is not so much the

The idea of God’s knocking at man’s heart originally comes from *Rev.*, 3.20.
² *The Basilicon Doron of King James IV* (1603), ed. James Craigie (Edinburgh, 1944),
pp. 41–43.
actual knocking at the south door of the castle but the knocking of Conscience at Macbeth's heart. And because it is no less than God, the supreme Judge of good and evil, that is knocking, the effect of “a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity” is produced.

As Good Angel and Evil Angel visit the hero in Marlowe’s *Faustus*, the diabolical and the Divine both call on Macbeth more than once. We remember that Macbeth’s seated heart knocked at his ribs when he was rapt dwelling on the witches’ prophecy (i. iii. 136). Now at the second calling of Conscience after Duncan’s murder, Macbeth is made bitterly conscious of his foulness. His conscience is, as it were, “the glass of reason”, in which for example, Wit, the hero of the morality play *Wyt and Science*, finds himself foul.\(^1\) In this context, we may hold that conscience, which means both conscience and consciousness, is one and the same with self-knowledge, which is again closely related with reason.

Incidentally Macbeth’s foulness is visually presented by his blood-stained hand, as the spotted face of Falsehood in Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon* symbolizes moral corruption,\(^2\) and so does the spotted figure of Bad Fame in the title page picture of Walter Raleigh’s *The History of the World*.\(^3\) In a “Narracio” attached to the homily “De Festo Pasche” in *Mirk’s Festial*, an angel says,

> Thes that han blody facys and blod droppe out of hor mowthes, tho ben envious men and woymen, and full of dedly wrath, and woll not amend hom, and gnawen hom byhynd, and be vsed to swere horrybull othys by Godys sydys and his blod, and vmbrayden God of his passyon, and don hym no reuurence: wherfor hor mowthys schull droppe of blod, tyll thay com to amendement.\(^4\)

In a similar way the blood on Macbeth’s hand is symbolical as the

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\(^3\) A reproduction is in R. A. Fraser, *Shakespeare’s Poetics in Relation to *King Lear*’* (London, 1962), plate vii.

visual representation of the foulness of his heart. It can also be compared with the ink on the face of Wit whom we have just referred to. Only the foul ink on Wit can be washed away, but the blood on Macbeth can never be.

Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red. (ii. ii. 59–62)

This is the result of Macbeth’s wilful suppression of Conscience, or Lady Macbeth’s murder of Pity in Macbeth’s heart in:

I have given suck, and know
How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this. (i. vii. 54–59)

Now Macbeth is deprived of grace, and “Amen” sticks in his throat. His personality is in disorder, his ‘will’ wanting to get rid of his conscience and self-knowledge, and his conscience wishing to renounce his will and the deed it presses him to do:

To know my deed, ’twere best not know myself. [Knock.
Wake Duncan with thy knocking: I would thou couldst.
(ii. ii. 72–73)

These last lines of the knocking scene spoken by Macbeth sound very much like Angelo in Measure for Measure, who, he himself believes, has defiled Isabella and treacherously killed Claudio:

Would yet he had liv’d!
Alack! when once our grace we have forgot,
Nothing goes right: we would and would not.¹

Thus grace has left Macbeth and he is sent towards Hell; his approach to Hell, however, seems quite ironically to overlap with the resurgence

¹ Measure, iv. iv. 32–34.
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of the ordinary world. In the knocking scene we are introduced with Macbeth into Hell, the awful parenthesis where time is annihilated, but Shakespeare in the following hell-gate scene, is doing at least two things at the same time. First he gives the image of hell to which sinners come, an avaricious farmer, a tailor thief who, as it were, usurped his customer’s cloth, and an equivocal Jesuit; and concurrently he makes us feel the sense of relief as if we were getting free from a parenthesis of suspended moments, like moments of the compunctions of guilty conscience. We are, in other words, led into the mouth of Hell and away from it at the same time. The fact is that Macbeth in the knocking scene has been conversing with his Conscience, he has been communicating with the Timeless while the usual time has been at a stop; and when his wife joins him, the knocking begins to change its meaning, from the calling of the divine Conscience to the actual knocking at the south entry. The world of time is returning.

The interaction in the knocking scene of the human world and the world of God and Hell, of the outer world of deeds and the inner world of conscience, is nothing but the interaction of the world of time and the world of the Timeless. The Timeless world of God and Hell, however, is not the other world beyond; it is within our ‘conscience’.

Though King James’s Basilicon Doron may have contributed something to the conscience theme of Macbeth, Shakespeare seems more elaborate in his dramatic presentation of the problem in the play than James in his philosophic discourse. William Perkins’s “A Discourse of Conscience” (1596),¹ I think, will better illuminate the varied phases of Macbeth’s conscience and the ways it works.

Perkins, like Thomas More and King James, admits the divinity of conscience,² but he, unlike them, is very detailed in describing the various facets of conscience, especially the “sundrie passions and motions in the heart” which are to be stirred up by “the accusing and

² Ibid., p. 517.
condemning conscience”:\(^1\) i.e. (1) shame, (2) sadness, (3) fear, (4) desperation, and (5) perturbation.

(1) The first is *shame*, which is an affection of the heart, whereby a man is grieued and displeased with himselfe, that he hath done any euil; and this shame sheweth it selfe by the rising of the blood from the heart to the face.\(^2\)

We remember Lady Macbeth saying to her husband,

Your face, my Thane, is as a book, where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like th' innocent flower,
But be the serpent under 't.
... Only look up clear;
To alter favour ever is to fear. \((1.\ v.\ 62-72)\)

Macbeth's countenance tells that he feels ashamed of his and his wife's proposed plan to murder Duncan, for "conscience," as Perkins says, "giues judgement of things to come"\(^3\) as well as things past. Lady Macbeth, being afraid that Macbeth is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness" \((1.\ v.\ 17)\), has recourse to her usual means of persuasion and encourages his manliness: "To alter favour ever is to fear."

(2) The second passion is *sadnes* and sorrow: commonly thought to be nothing else but *melancholy*: but betweene them twaine, there is great difference. Sorrow, that comes by melancholy, ariseth only of that humour annoying the body: but this other sorrow ariseth of a mans sinnes, for which his conscience accuseth him. Melancholie may be cured by physicke: this sorrow cannot bee cured by any thing, but by the blood of Christ.\(^4\)

In ii. ii., immediately after the murder of Duncan, the murderer begins to feel this kind of sadness.

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\(^1\) Ibid., p. 536.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid.
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*Mach.* This is a *sorry* sight.

*Lady M.* A foolish thought to say a *sorry* sight.

*Mach.* One cried, “God bless us!” and, “Amen,” the other, As they had seen me with these hangman’s hands.

List’ning their fear, I could not say, “Amen,” When they did say, “God bless us.”

*Lady M.* Consider it not so deeply.

*Mach.* But wherefore could not I pronounce “Amen”? I had most need of blessing, and “Amen” Stuck in my throat.

*Lady M.* These deeds must not be thought After these ways: so, it will make us mad.

(II. ii. 20–33; my italics)

From the way Macbeth thinks of his “hangman’s hands” it is quite clear that his conscience is already condemning him. Though grace and blessing have left him, he still knows that he badly needs them, for his self-knowledge, or his conscience, is not yet benumbed or seared. Lady Macbeth warns against the danger of madness (an ironical premonition of her own final collapse), for she knows that this kind of sadness usually leads to madness.¹ Melancholy must be got rid of if the murderer and his collaborator are to be free from future nightmares and insomnia, for the imaginative Macbeth has already begun to suffer from the accusing and condemning conscience:

*Mach.* Still it cried, “Sleep no more!” to all the house: “Glamis hath murther’d Sleep, and therefore Cawdor Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!”

*Lady M.* Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy Thane, You do unbend your noble strength, to think So brainsickly of things. (II. ii. 40–45)

Lady Macbeth is again having recourse to Macbeth’s ‘courage’ referring to it as “your noble strength.” She goes on,

The sleeping, and the dead,

¹ Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* is a study of this kind of melancholy and its ensuing madness.
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. 

(II. ii. 52-54)

Natural fear is called childish and manly courage is urged as a solution to the sadness of the guilty heart.

Though Lady Macbeth says, "A little water clears us of this deed" (II. ii. 66), Macbeth himself knows well that his hand

will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

(II. ii. 60-62)

The point is that as long as memory is working, the past deeds will pursue the doer however keenly he wishes to escape from them. Even to Lady Macbeth who urged her husband to murder Duncan, the result of the evil deed is this:

Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. 

(III. ii. 4-7)

For, according to Perkins,

Memorie serues to bring to minde [by which conscience is to give judgement] the particular actions which a man hath done or not done, that conscience may determine of them.¹

And yet Lady Macbeth wilfully attempts to sever herself from the past, and tells her husband to do the same and cast off melancholy.

... why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using those thoughts, which should indeed have died
With them they think on? Things without all remedy
Should be without regard: what's done is done.

(III. ii. 8-12; my italics)

Freedom from the past, however, cannot be gained in such a way, because our consciousness is not such a thing as we can cut part of it away

¹ Perkins, p. 535.
from the rest, but it is in the state of "pure duration" which "forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. . . . We can thus conceive of succession without distinction, and think of it as a mutual penetration, and interconnexion and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought."1

However deeply Macbeth is moved by supernatural or natural temptation, or however widely he jumps from his former self to his newly assumed self (which is symbolized by the clothing imagery), he will never free himself from his original fundamental self to change into the self he desires to be. For,

When our most trustworthy friends agree in advising us to take some important step, the sentiments which they utter with so much insistence lodge on the surface of our ego and there get solidified. . . . Little by little they will form a thick crust which will cover up our own sentiments; we shall believe that we are acting freely, and it is only by looking back to the past, later on, that we shall see how much we were mistaken. But then, at the very minute when the act is going to be performed, something may revolt against it. It is the deep-seated self rushing up to the surface. It is the outer crust bursting, suddenly giving way to an irresistible thrust. Hence in the depths of the self, below this most reasonable pondering over most reasonable pieces of advice, something else was going on—a gradual heating and a sudden boiling over of feelings and ideas, not unperceived, but rather unnoticed. If we turn back to them and carefully scrutinize our memory, we shall see that we had ourselves shaped these ideas, ourselves lived these feelings, but that, through some strange reluctance to exercise our will, we had thrust them back into the darkest depths of our soul whenever they came up to the surface. . . . In short, we are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work.2

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth willfully persist in acting against their

deep-seated selves, and their personalities get more and more unnatu-
really distorted and dehumanized, their sadness more and more
fearful. And the suppressed self of Lady Macbeth finally rushes up to
the surface in the sleep-walking scene. Her madness is as it were a
sweeping resurgence of her suppressed past. Her mind cannot recon-
cile it with the present, or her past confounds her present, and thus it
brings her whole personality to destruction.

Needless to say, Perkins’s idea of the “sorrow [of conscience which]
cannot be cured by any thing, but by the blood of Christ” distinguished
from the “melancholy [which] may be cured by physicke” lies at the
back of Shakespeare’s scene of Lady Macbeth’s sleep-walking, where
the Doctor says, “more needs she the divine than the physician”
(v. i. 71).

(3) The third is feare, in causing whereof, conscience is verie forcible. If
a man had all the delights & pleasures that heart can wish, they cannot doe
him any good if conscience bee guiltie. Belshazzar when he was in the
middest of all his delights, and saw the hand writing vpon the wall; his
countenance changed, his thoughts troubled him, his ioynts loosed, and his knees smote
together, Dan. 5.6. Yea the guiltie conscience will make a man afraid, if
hee see but a worme pepe out of the ground: or a silly creature goe crosse
his way; or if he see but his owne shadow on a suddaine, or if he doe but
forecast an euill with himselfe, Pro. 28.1. The wicked flyeth when no man
pursueth him.

Terrous of conscience, which are more vehement, cause other passions
in the body, as exceeding heate, like that which is in the fitte of an ague, the
rising of the entrals towards the mouth; and swounings; as experience
hath often shewed. And the writer of the booke of wisedome saith
truely, cap. 17.10. It is a fearefull thing when malice is condemned by her owne
testimony, and a conscience that is touched, doth euer forecast cruell things. For
feare is nothing else, but the betraying of the succours, that reason offereth, &c.
They that did endure the night [The darkene of Egypt] that was intolerable,
&c. sometimes were troubled with monstrous visions, and sometimes they swound, as
though their owne soules should betray them: for a sudden feare not looked for, came
upon them.\footnote{Perkins, p. 536.}
Fear and terrors caused by guilty conscience are the most striking features of the psychology of Macbeth. The fear Macbeth is feeling on his way to the murder of Duncan is, though remotely, linked with the fear of conscience.

Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my where-about,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. (II. i. 36–60)

He is wishing that nothing will witness his evil deed, and yet his very ‘conscience’ seated deep within him is aware that heaven never fails to witness. Macbeth here is a divided person; one half of him is a murderer going to kill the king, and the other half watching the murderer in a curiously objective way, as is seen in his reference to his own steps as “they.”

After the deed his conscience begins to accuse him more explicitly: I’ll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on’t again I dare not. (II. ii. 49–51)

and a few lines later comes the knocking, the moral significance of which we have already discussed. And “every noise,” like Perkins’s “worme peep[ing] out of the ground,” “appals” Macbeth, and his own hands almost “pluck out [his] eyes.”

Macbeth, guilty in his conscience, is now afraid of Banquo and his “royalty of nature” (III. i. 49), and Lady Macbeth in III. ii. is also thinking about Banquo in her fearful thought of their “doubtful joy” “without content,” which they dearly purchased by destruction (III. ii. 4–7). Macbeth mentions their “meal in fear” and “the affliction of [the] terrible dreams,/That shake [them] nightly” and wishes to change places with Duncan now restful in his grave (III. ii. 16–26).

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It is quite likely that Macbeth, whose “heat-oppressed brain” (II. i. 39) had produced a false dagger before his first murder, should be “troubled with monstrous visions.” And in III. iv. we have a terrible vision that haunts Macbeth like “the fitte of an ague”1—the ghost of Banquo.

The anti-feast in this banquet scene is a supreme invention of Shakespeare’s, where he imaginatively deals with the theme of nature and the unnatural. Feast and “society” with its ordered “degrees”2 which constitute the vision of nature are both utterly destroyed when the party comes untimely to be dispersed.

At once, good night:—
Stand not upon the order of your going,
But go at once. (III. iv. 117-119; my italics)

This confusion, which makes the lords suspicious of Macbeth’s hidden guilt and eventually opens the way to his downfall, has been created by nothing but conscience accusing Macbeth of his murder of Banquo accomplished in an underhand way. He thought, before the appearance of the ghost, that since Banquo was now dead there would be security at least till the escaped Fleance grew a threat.

There the grown serpent lies; the worm, that’s fled,
Hath nature that in time will venom breed,
No teeth for th’ present. (III. iv. 28-30)

It seems to me that the “worm” here implies the “worme of conscience” Perkins mentions more than once in his treatise.

... conscience is compared to a worme that neuer dieth, but alwais lies gnawing and grabbling, and pulling at the heart of man, Mark. 9.44. and

1 Cf. III. iv. 19, 54, where Shakespeare like Perkins uses the word “fit”.
causeth mor paine and anguish, then any disease in the world can do.\textsuperscript{1}

Conscience, Perkins says, does not accuse the sinner in the act of sinning, but when it is done and past.\textsuperscript{2} And this may be why Macbeth thinks that the worm has “No teeth for th’ present” and that he will be safe at least for some time. But this hope, together with another hope that he will be free from fear this time because Banquo was murdered by the hired assassins and not by himself,\textsuperscript{3} turns out to be in vain. The conscience of imaginative and quick-minded Macbeth so soon begins to accuse him by evoking the ghost of Banquo. And the way the ghost appears at Macbeth’s false regrets at Banquo’s absence is ironical enough.\textsuperscript{4}

(4) The fourth is desperation, whereby a man through the vehement and constant accusation of his conscience comes to bee out of all hope of the pardon of his sinnes. This made Saul, Achitophel, and Judas to hang them selues; this makes many in these daies to doe the like; as appeareth by the declarations of such as haue bin preuented, when they were about to hang or drown themselves, or to cut their owne throates.\textsuperscript{5}

Desperation or despair is the extreme opposite of hope. In Ludus Coventriae, St. John the Baptist preaches,

The path to salvation... lies exactly centered between emotional forces. Upon the right you must understand hope, which springs from our knowledge of God’s mercy; upon the left you must understand dread, which springs from our knowledge of God’s justice. A swerving to the right is a swerving toward hope without dread, which is presumption; to the left, toward dread without hope, which is desperation.\textsuperscript{6}


\textsuperscript{2} Perkins, p. 536.

\textsuperscript{3} Cf. iii. iv. 49.

\textsuperscript{4} Cf. iii. iv. 39–40, 89–90. Also cf. “Let your Highness / Command upon me, to the which my duties / Are with a most indissoluble tie / For ever knit” (iii. i. 15–17).

\textsuperscript{5} Perkins, p. 536.

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ludus Coventriae}, ed. K. S. Block (EETS, 1922), p. 229.
And this desperation usually tends towards a death-wish and self-slaughter as we see in such cases of conscience as *The Conflict of Conscience, Doctor Faustus*, and *Hamlet*. In *Macbeth* there is no explicit statement that Lady Macbeth killed herself, but we are expected to gather so from the Doctor’s suggestive warning to the Waiting-Gentlewoman:

Look after her;
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
And still keep eyes upon her, (v. i. 72-74)

and from the speech of the newly proclaimed King Malcolm at the end of the play:

... [the] fiend-like Queen,
Who, as ’tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life. (v. ix. 35-37)

(5) The last is a perturbation or disquietness of the whole man: whereby all the powers and faculties of the whole man are forth of order. *Isa. 57.20.*

*The wicked is like the raging of the sea that can not rest, whose waters cast up mire & dirt.*

It has already been noted that Macbeth, like Richard III, irritatedly keeps changing his mind towards the end of the play. In the culmination of his villainy at the time of his murder of Macduff’s wife and children, his conscience is hardened, and now Macbeth, who at the time of his first murder startled at every actual and imaginary noise, is not affected at all even by the news of his wife’s death.

I have almost forgot the taste of fears.
The time has been, my senses would have cool’d
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir,
As life were in’t. I have supp’d full with horrors:
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me. (v. v. 9-15)

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Macbeth’s conscience is not “stirring”; it is now “dead”.¹ “Dead conscience,” says Perkins, “hath two degrees. The first is the slumbering or the benumbed conscience; the second is the seared conscience.”² While Lady Macbeth’s conscience at the time of Duncan’s murder is the slumbering conscience, which is to accuse her when it awakes, Macbeth’s in Act v is the seared conscience; for,

This kind of conscience is not in all men, but in such persons as are become obstinate heretics and notorious malefactours. And it is not in them by nature, but by an increase of the corruption of nature; & that by certain steps and degrees . . . Now the heart of man being exceedingly obstinate & peruerse, carrieth him to commit sins euen against the light of nature & common sense: by practise of such sins the light of nature is extinguished: & then commeth the reprobate minde, which judgeth euill good, & good euill: after this follows the seared conscience, in which there is no feeling or remorse: & after this comes an exceeding greedines to all maner of sin,

Eph. 4.119; Rom. 1.28.³

Macbeth, hearing the news of his wife’s death, shows “no feeling or remorse”. He only says, “She should have died hereafter,” and the soliloquy follows which begins “To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow”. The “increase of the corruption of nature” has produced “the seared conscience” and the vision of Nothingness,⁴ where everything is hollow and absurd, “signifying nothing” (v. v. 28). This is the exact opposite of the attitude of the former Thane of Cawdor who

set forth
A deep repentance . . . [and] died
As one that had been studied in his death,
To throw away the dearest thing he ow’d,
As ’twere a careless trifle.

(t. iv. 6–11)

¹ Perkins, p. 549.
² Ibid., p. 550.
³ Ibid.
Macbeth, with his conscience seared, his reason usurped of its command by passion, and his nature corrupted by perverted 'will,' cannot possibly repent, nor die a calm death. His "state of man" is in confusion and perturbation: incongruously, he \textit{wills} to fight "till from [his] bones [his] flesh be hack'd" (v. iii. 32), \textit{and he does not will} to fight when he encounters Macduff, for "[his] soul is too much charg'd/With blood of [Macduff's] already" (v. viii. 4-6, 22). Or it may be better to say that however bestial and brutish Macbeth is, he is still a man, for perturbation is a sign of it. "The idea of a 'good' Macbeth, buried somewhere beneath the activities of a will dedicated to evil, has not been allowed to perish altogether at any point in the play." Eventually, however, Macbeth stifles his conscience or better nature by wilful persistence. His enormous will power still supports him against the disadvantages that "Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,/And [Macduff] oppos'd, being of no woman born" (v. viii. 30-31). "Yet I \textit{will} try the last," says Macbeth. And thus his downfall reaches its destination, the everlasting bonfire.

Shakespeare has explored the depth of human conscience in \textit{Macbeth}, but the exploration has not exhausted the whole scope of man's conscience. The other half of the question—the problem of the authority of conscience and that of man's law, and especially the problem of the reformation of conscience, with the involved issues of the knowledge of law, of the sorrow in the punishment of sin, and of the sinner's humiliation and deprecation before he is excused and brought to peace with God—all these aspects of conscience, discussed by Perkins but left unexplored in \textit{Macbeth}, are dealt with in such plays as \textit{Measure for Measure}\textsuperscript{2} and \textit{The Winter's Tale}.


\textsuperscript{2} In this sense \textit{Measure for Measure} is, I think, a Christian play, though Ernest Schanzer argues to the contrary. See Schanzer, \textit{The Problem Plays of Shakespeare} (London, 1963), pp. 128-129.