



“Fair is foul and foul is fair” (The Witches, Act I)

REVISION

Explanation:

The first words of the play introduce the key theme of the supernatural. The **repeated alliteration** of the ‘f’ characterises the witches as ‘other’ as their speech is unusual. The witches will go on to talk in such riddles throughout the remainder of the play. Shakespeare suggests through this phrase that appearances will not be what they seem. When Macbeth speaks his first words ‘so foul and fair a day I have not seen’, Shakespeare links him with the witches, suggesting he may also prove untrustworthy.

Themes:

the Supernatural, Appearances versus Reality, Morality

REVISION



**“Brave Macbeth – well he
deserves that name”
(The Captain, Act I)**

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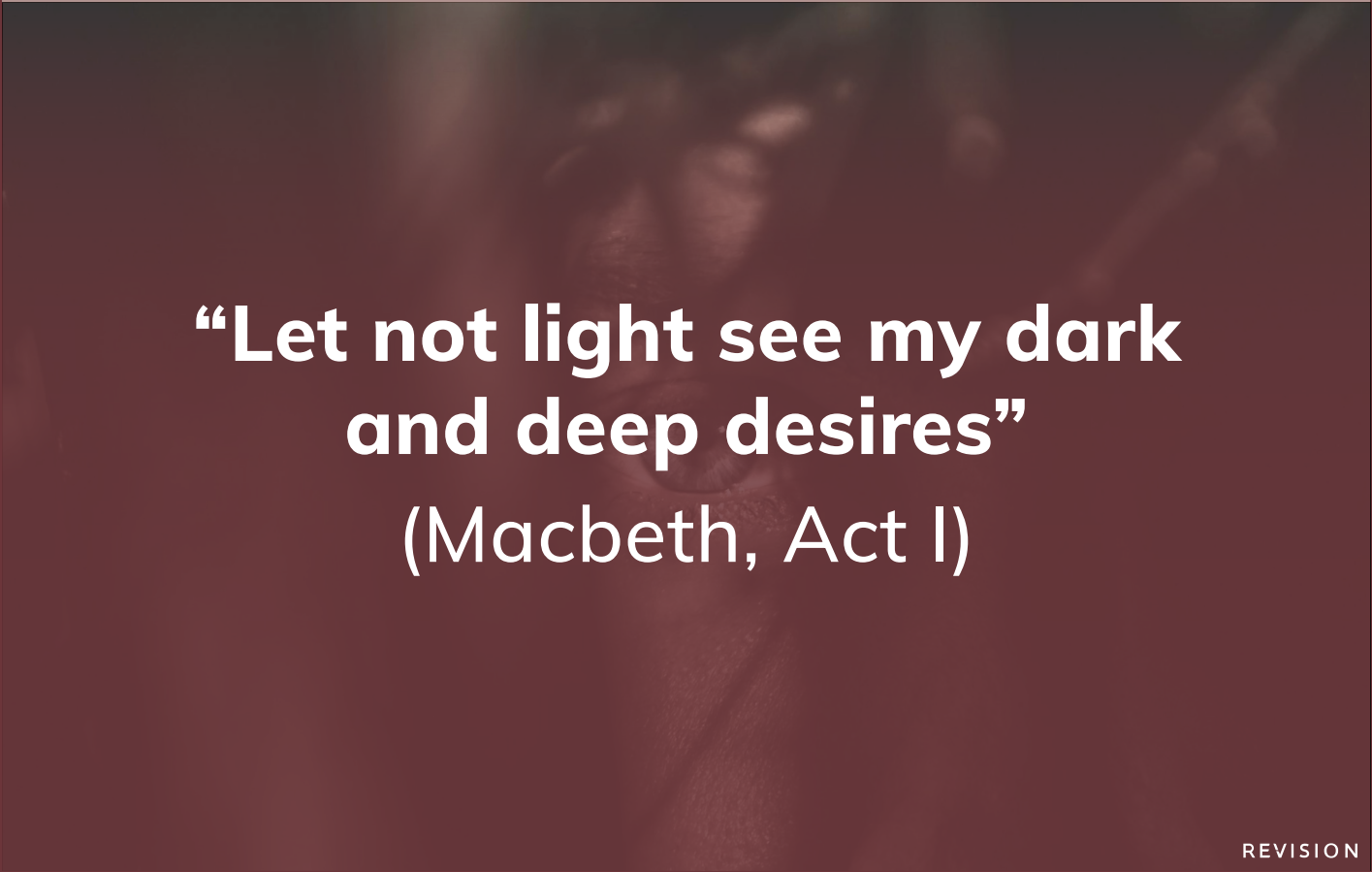
Explanation:

We hear about Macbeth before we meet him – it is important that the audience knows how courageous and well-thought of he is by others to set him up for the fall of the **tragic hero**. The apparently throwaway comment introduces the key idea of deserving your name, e.g. Macbeth does not deserve to be ‘King Macbeth’ but King Duncan did. Later, his **metaphorical** kingly robes ‘hang loose about him like a giant’s robe’.

Themes:

Masculinity, Patriotism, Kingship, Tragic Hero

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**“Let not light see my dark
and deep desires”**
(Macbeth, Act I)

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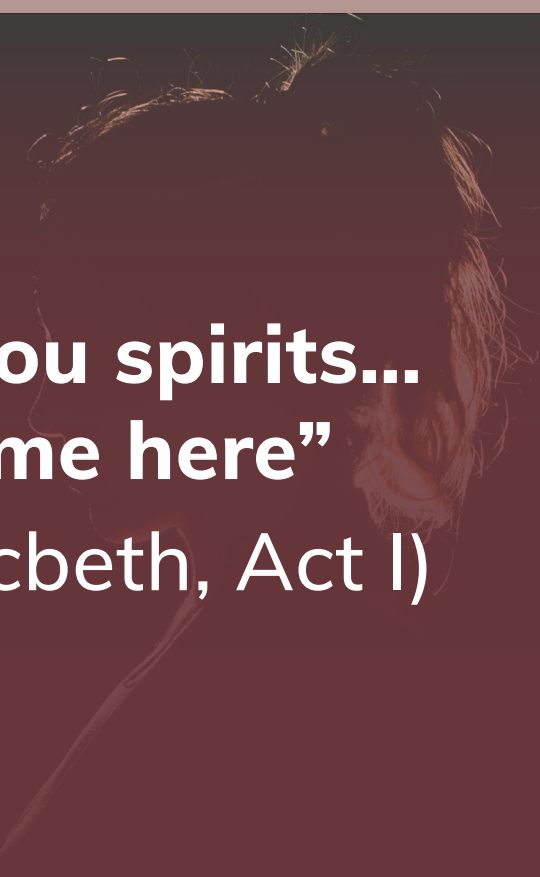
Explanation:

After the battle, King Duncan announces that Malcolm will be his heir. Macbeth acknowledges, in an **aside**, that this stands in the way of the witches' prophecy. He may well be afraid of the consequences of going against God since light **symbolises** Heaven and the dark **represents** Hell and temptation. Macbeth is apparently prepared to risk eternal punishment in the afterlife to become the next king. Macbeth's words link to his wife's **soliloquy** where she wishes to prevent Heaven peeping through the dark to see the knife she is preparing for Duncan.

Themes:

Loyalty, Christianity, the Supernatural, Ambition

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**“Come, you spirits...
unsex me here”**
(Lady Macbeth, Act I)

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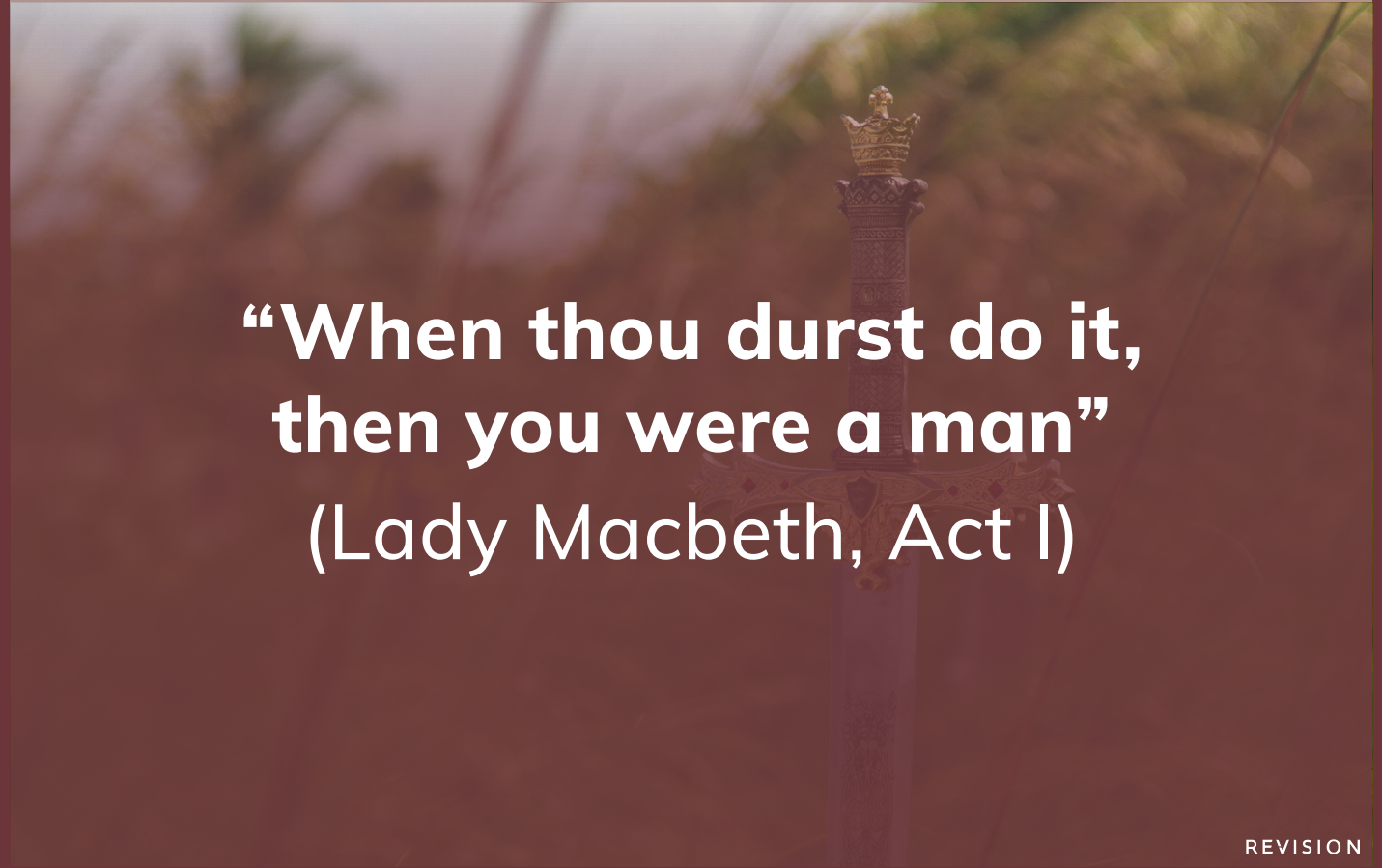
Explanation:

Shakespeare presents a connection between Lady Macbeth and the Supernatural. Inviting them with the **imperative verb** to ‘come’, it suggests she is welcoming the devil’s agents into her life, which a Shakespearean audience would view as a serious lack of judgement, going against the strict Christian values of the time. People feared the supernatural and took action to protect themselves from it. Lady Macbeth feels her feminine qualities make her weak so she is rejecting them, in itself a comment on the society of her time. Her words form part of a longer **soliloquy** where Lady Macbeth is perhaps deliberately presented as if she is casting a spell.

Themes:

the Supernatural, Gender Roles, Ambition

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“When thou durst do it,
then you were a man”
(Lady Macbeth, Act I)

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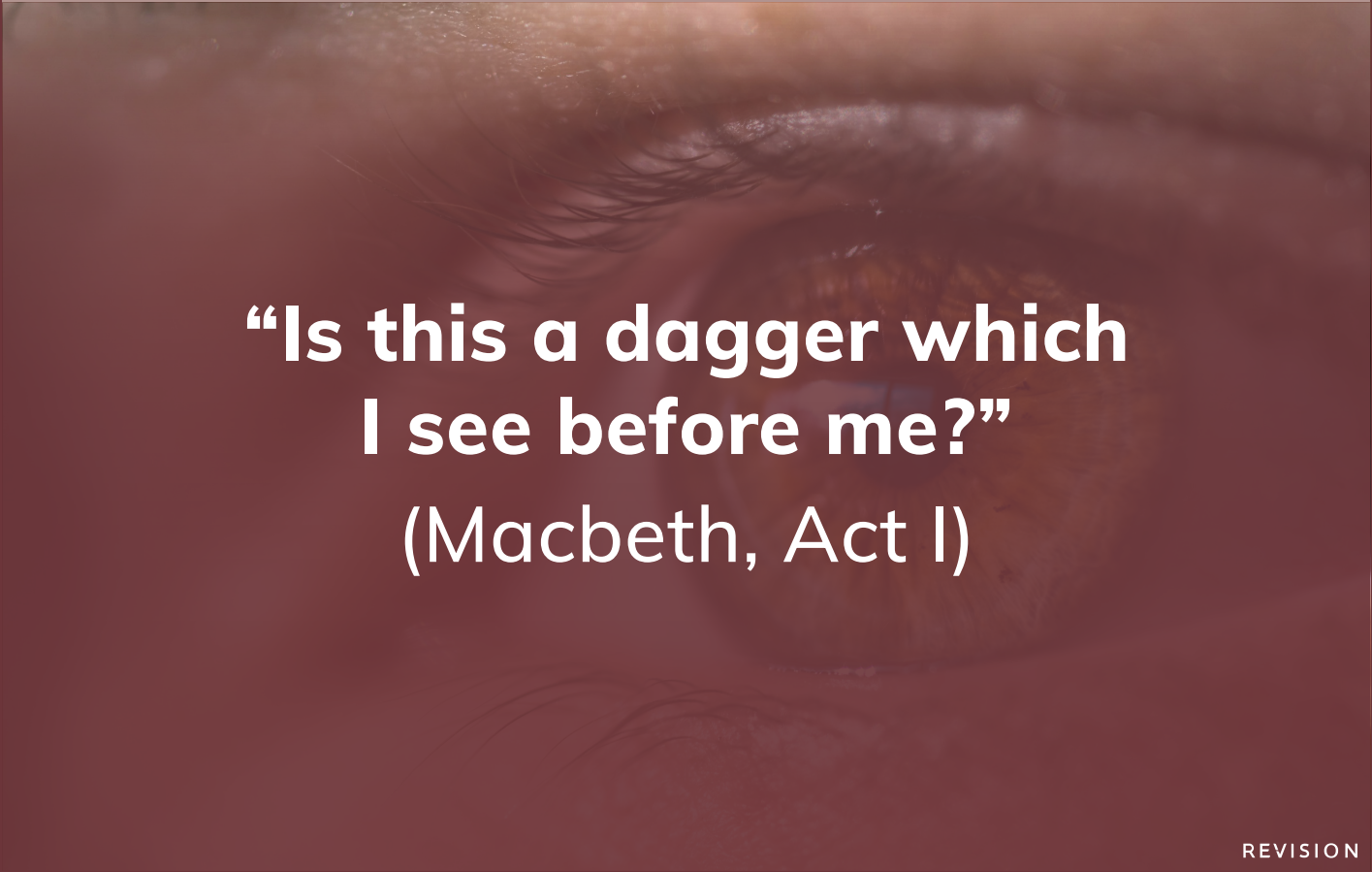
Explanation:

Here, Lady Macbeth challenges Macbeth’s masculinity as he attempts to change his mind about killing Duncan. She manipulates her husband by using the expectations of the time against him – if he cannot be courageous in this act then he is not a man at all. The **pronouns** ‘thou’ and ‘you’ lend an accusatory **tone**. Usually, wives did not challenge their husband’s decisions, so Lady Macbeth’s behaviour is **atypical**. It links to her earlier fears that Macbeth is ‘too full o’ the milk of human kindness’ to commit this crime. It proves that, at this stage, Macbeth is still inherently good and loyal to the king. Ultimately, though, he loves his wife and doesn’t want to disappoint her.

Themes:

Masculinity, Loyalty, Gender Roles

REVISION



**“Is this a dagger which
I see before me?”
(Macbeth, Act I)**

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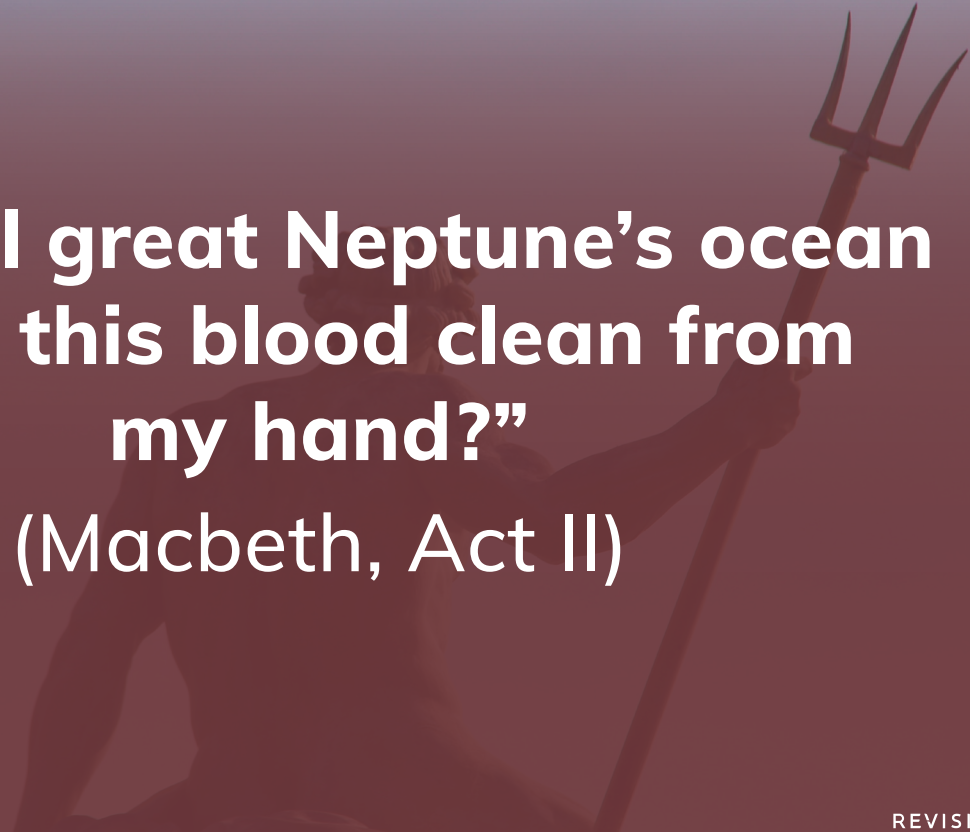
Explanation:

This scene introduces the theme of madness as it appears that Macbeth is hallucinating a dagger leading him to Duncan. Hallucinations were considered to be a sign of insanity; Shakespeare later has Lady Macbeth hallucinate spots of blood when her mental health deteriorates. A dagger **symbolises** violence and sneakiness. It is a dishonourable weapon, unlike the sword Macbeth wins the battle with at the start of the play. His character has deteriorated, therefore it is significant that Macbeth sees a dagger rather than a sword. Another reading is that the witches are interfering in Macbeth’s destiny again, creating the dagger to ensure he does not change his mind.

Themes:

the Supernatural, Loyalty, Madness, Honour

REVISION



“Will all great Neptune’s ocean
wash this blood clean from
my hand?”
(Macbeth, Act II)

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Explanation:

Macbeth’s mention of Neptune might **signify** his subconscious rejection of God or Christianity. He is not seeking help from his Christian god but from a Roman one and is clearly aware of the consequences of his sinful ambition. It is as if he knows his previous relationship with God is now broken. In this play, blood **symbolises** guilt and Macbeth’s words here **contrast** with his wife’s belief that ‘a little water clears us of this deed’.

Themes:

Religion, Guilt, Ambition

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**“Never shake thy gory
locks at me”
(Macbeth, Act III)**

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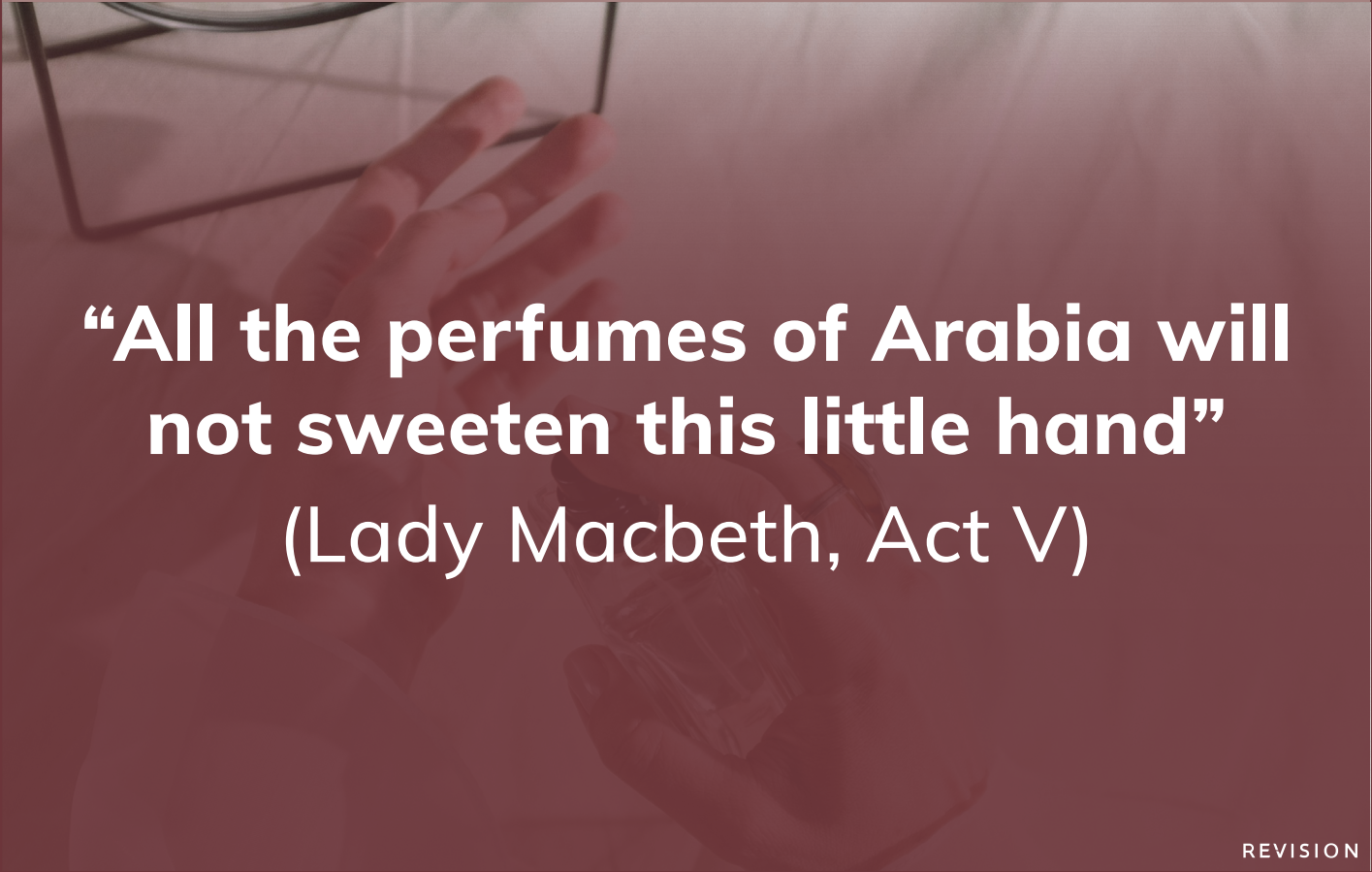
Explanation:

The theme of the supernatural resurfaces as the audience wonders whether the witches have caused Banquo's ghost to appear. Once again, hallucination **represents** Macbeth's guilt and he is terrified of the vision as it quite literally stares him in the face. The **adjective** 'gory' describes Banquo's blood and the violence of his death at Macbeth's command. Banquo appears to be shaking his head, as if he is judging Macbeth for his actions, and Macbeth's desperate **command** for him to stop shows a desperate and out-of-control king.

Themes:

the Supernatural, Guilt, Madness

REVISION



**“All the perfumes of Arabia will
not sweeten this little hand”**
(Lady Macbeth, Act V)

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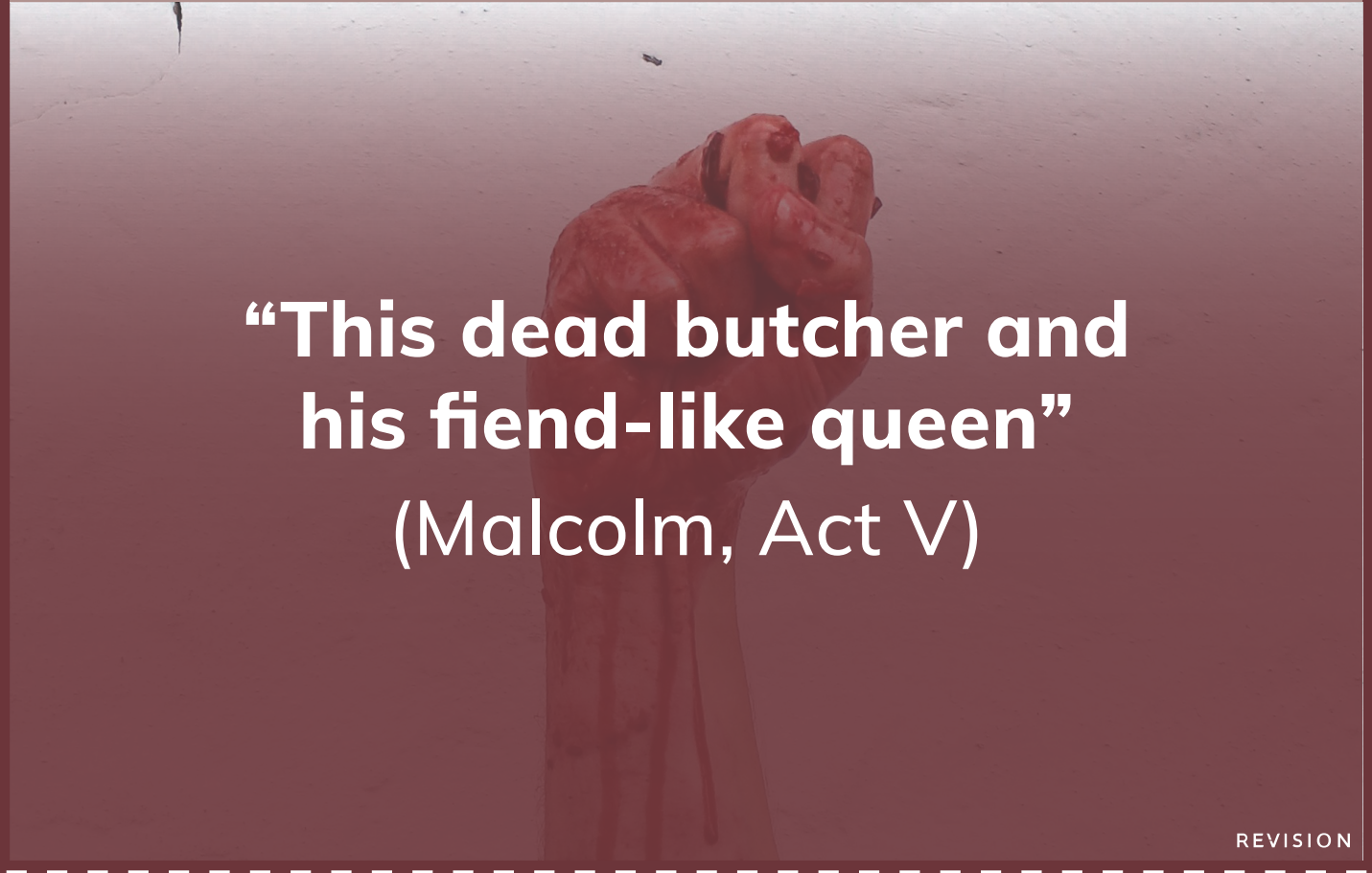
Explanation:

Lady Macbeth is terrified of the consequences of her sin. She seems to feel that if there is no evidence (smell) of her crime, her fears will disappear. Earlier, Lady Macbeth asked to be unsexed, yet here she seems to embrace the concept of femininity in considering the power of perfume to purify her soul. The **hyperbole** of ‘all the perfumes’ indicates a desperation to be absolved of sin. The **adjective** ‘little’ suggests she has not succeeded in becoming strong and courageous, like the man she thought she wanted to be.

Themes:

Gender Roles, Guilt, Madness, Religion

REVISION



**“This dead butcher and
his fiend-like queen”**
(Malcolm, Act V)

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Explanation:

The word ‘butcher’ is a direct reference to the theme of violence and to Macbeth’s brutal slaughter of defenceless victims such as Lady Macduff and her son. Macbeth is the **tragic hero** that has fallen from grace. The **adjective** ‘fiend-like’ to describe Lady Macbeth is a further reminder of the connection between her and the devil; she gave in to temptation and will now suffer eternal damnation according to the beliefs of the time.

Both of their deaths fit the **tragedy genre**.

Themes:

Tragic Hero, Religion, Kingship, Power

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