A. (Twelfth Night)

2. (2.2.23-30)

This passage by Viola (dressed as Cesario) reveals her frustration and her feelings of helplessness at the love triangle that has developed between her, Orsino, and Olivia because of her disguise. More importantly, however, the passage reveals how Viola has internalized the misogyny of her patriarchal society—she knows the fact that Olivia has fallen in love with her as Cesario, but she does not see the situation as a strong woman exercising her will against the expectations society places on her, as Viola might well think. Instead, she sees the “frailty” of women—“How easy, ’tis for the proper pulse / In women’s broken hearts to set their forms!” (2.7-28). Viola believes Olivia, being a frail woman, impressionable.
emotionally, simply couldn’t help falling for
Cesario, even though Viola thinks it was not
correct of her to. Even so, it is interesting to
wonder what Viola does think Olivia should
do, if Viola is in love with Orsino, so it seems as
if it is a better fate that in Viola’s eyes that
Olivia love Cesario rather than Orsino.

This passage also raises the issue of Viola’s
own attitude toward her male alter ego.
It is clear that she finds Olivia’s “froulty” to
be problematic. One wonders if Viola enjoys her
disguise to some how be free of the so-called
“weaknesses” of femininity. Indeed, the tone of
the passage indicates that Viola is criticizing
Olivia’s femininity from a perceived distance as
if she were no longer a woman at all. The
disguise seems to be so complete that Viola is
losing her identity in it - or perhaps only
the assigned identity based on gender she once knew.

The passage begins with Viola's statement that

"I am the man." (2.2.23).

Perhaps Viola's discontentment with her disguise in this passage ("Disguise, I see, than art wickedness") comes not as much from the Puritan conviction that cross-dressing was inherently wicked as it does from the upsetting of once-clear gender divisions. Her disguise leads to attracting, especially in the case of Olivia, that cannot be fulfilled in the framework of the play's culture nor in its format: A comedy must end in marriages, and homosexual union was not even a concept at this time. Thus, Olivia does not seize this opportunity to explore the meaning of sexuality and gender because she can hardly conceive of those things. She has been so instructed in heterosexual monoculture that she
cannot seriously consider Olivia's desires for her as Cesario: "Poor lady, she were better here a dream."

(2.2.24).

An added dimension of complexity comes when considering that the original productions the play was written for would have cast Peter a teenage boy as Viola-playing-Cesario. This added layer of gender confusion was a well-accepted device, but audiences may have still been aware of its significance. This understanding emphasizes the homoerotic crosswinds between Ovidio and Cesario. Viola, playing Cesario, is "truly a man, but the actor is "truly" a boy.

The third level of sexual confusion brings a sense that no matter what happens in this love triangle, gender will never be clear, and the gender issues raised go deeper than the play's highly optimistic ending.
B. (Macbeth)

5. "What man dare, I dare" (3.4.98)

This short line, spoken by Macbeth, reveals much about Macbeth's mentality and also his attitudes toward the society in which he lives. This is a very bold line, spoken at a time when his mental stability is collapsing, and he sees apparitions of Banquo haunting him.

It is a bold line which contrasts with his earlier hesitancy, when Lady Macbeth must insist his sleep in order to get him to go through with the murder of Duncan. Perhaps Macbeth is attempting to assert his masculinity in this passage as a sort of defense mechanism, preventing him from examining his own guilt or his emotional instability. Perhaps he regrets the
way in which Lady Macbeth convinces
him to commit the murder, and this reassertion
of his masculinity and the positive, nearly quality of
"daring" is intended to convince himself,
once again, that what he did was somehow
noble or respectable.

The line concentrates many of the play's
themes - among them, the question of
moral masculinity or masculinity as well as the
problems of pre-medieval feudal warrior-societies,
where the valued military prowess, valor, and
domination brought heads with the feudal
expected reverence for Kings. The social
system seems similar in many ways to
social relations between packs of wolves or
dogs. In such a system, an "Alpha Male" tends
to emerge, but usually through aggression
victors in battles with fellow pack members.
In a way, then, Macbeth's concern is understandable. He expects to be honored, his masculinity and strength reaffirmed, by usurping his leader's position through killing him. He expects to become the "Alpha Male," and so faces difficulty understanding opposition to his rule. This line, "What man dare I dare," is an attempt to re-establish himself as "head of the pack."

Macbeth's line also seems to be a struggle against his own growing instability and perhaps insanity. The line seems to be addressed toward the "ghost of Banquo," who may or may not exist only within Macbeth's head, as he is the only person who witnesses it. Lady Macbeth says Macbeth's total insanity, as distinct from reality, has come in beats since childhood. She may be trying to explain many of his current behavior, but it Macbeth has been struggling with vision...
hallucinations, etc.; possibly the beginnings of schizophrenia—“What was done, I done.”

It may be an attempt by Kedell to deny that his condition really compromised his abilities or his masculinity.

What men ideas?

A woman.