Poetry for Reading or Singing? — Purcell, Dryden, Dramatic Opera and the musicality of the Iambic Pentameter

Ex. 1 — Davenant, The Siege of Rhodes (The Fourth Entry)

The Scene is vary’d to the Prospect of Mount Philermus: Artificers appearing at work about that Castle which was there, with wonderful expedition, erected by Solyman. His great Army is discovered in the Plain below, drawn up in Battalia, as if it were prepar’d for a general Assault.

_The Entry is again prepar’d by Instrumental Musick._

Enter Solyman, Pirrhus, Mustapha.

_Solyman._
Refuse my Pass-port, and resolve to dye;
Only for fashions sake, for company?
Oh costly scruples! But I’le try to be,
Thou stubborn Honour, obstinate as thee.
My Pow’r thou shalt not vanquish by thy will,
I will enforce to live whom thou wouldst kill.

_Pirrhus._
They in to morrow’s storm will change their mind,
Then, though too late instructed, they shall find,
That those who your protection dare reject
No humane Power dares venture to protect.
They are not Foes, but Rebels, who withstand
The pow’r that does their Fate command.

_Solyman._
Oh Mustapha, our strength we measure ill,
We want the half of what we think we have;
For we enjoy the Beast-like pow’r to kill,
But not the God-like pow’r to save.
Who laughs at Death, laughs at our highest Pow’r;
The valiant man is his own Emperour.

Ex. 2 — Davenant, The Siege of Rhodes (The Second Entry)

Admir. France strives to have her Lillies grow as fair
In others Realms as where they Native are.
Viller. The English Lyon ever loves to change
His Walks, and in remoter Forrests range.
Chorus. All gaining vainly from each other’s loss;
Whilst still the Crescent drives away the Cross.

_Aphon._
1. How bravely fought the fiery French.
Their Bulwark being storm’d?
The colder Almans kept their Trench,
By more than Valour warm’d.
2. The grave Italians paus’d and fought,
The solemn Spaniards too;
Study’ng more Deaths than could be wrought
By what the rash could do.
3. Th’ Avergnian Colours high were rais’d,
Twice tane, and twice reliev’d.
Our Foes, like Friends to Valour, prais’d
The mischiefs they receiv’d.
4. The cheerful English got renown;
Fought merrily and fast:
’Tis time, they cry’d, to mow them down,
Wars Harvest cannot last.
5. If Death be Rest, here let us dye,
Where weariness is all
We dayly get by Victory,
Who must by Famine fall.
6. Great Solyman is landed now;
All Fate he seems to be;
And brings those Tempests in his Brow
Which he deserv’d at Sea.
Cassand. Our little Entertainment waits; not worth
A longer Ceremony, please to Grace it.

The SCENE opens and discovers Cassandra’s Apartment.
Musicans and Dancers — Ptolemy leads in Cassandra,
Sofybius follows — they Sit. Towards the end of the Song and
Dance; Enter Cleomenes and Cleanthes on one side of the
Stage, where they stand.

SONG

No, no, poor suff’ring Heart, no Change endeavour,
Choose to sustain the smart, rather than leave her;
My ravish’d Eyes behold such Charms about her,
I can dye with her, but not live without her.
One tender Sigh of hers to see me Languish,
Will more than pay the price of my past Anguish:
Beware O cruel Fair, how you smile on me,
’Twas a kind Look of yours that has undone me.

Love has in store for me one happy Minute,
And She will end my pain who did begin it;
Then no day void of Bliss, or Pleasure leaving,
Ages shall slide away without perceiving:
Cupid shall guard the Door the more to please us,
And keep out Time and Death when they would seize us:
Love has found out a way to Live by Dying.